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Rāmānuja
on
The Gītā

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Śrī Rāmānuja

on

The Gītā

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and Research in Philosophy

University of Mysore



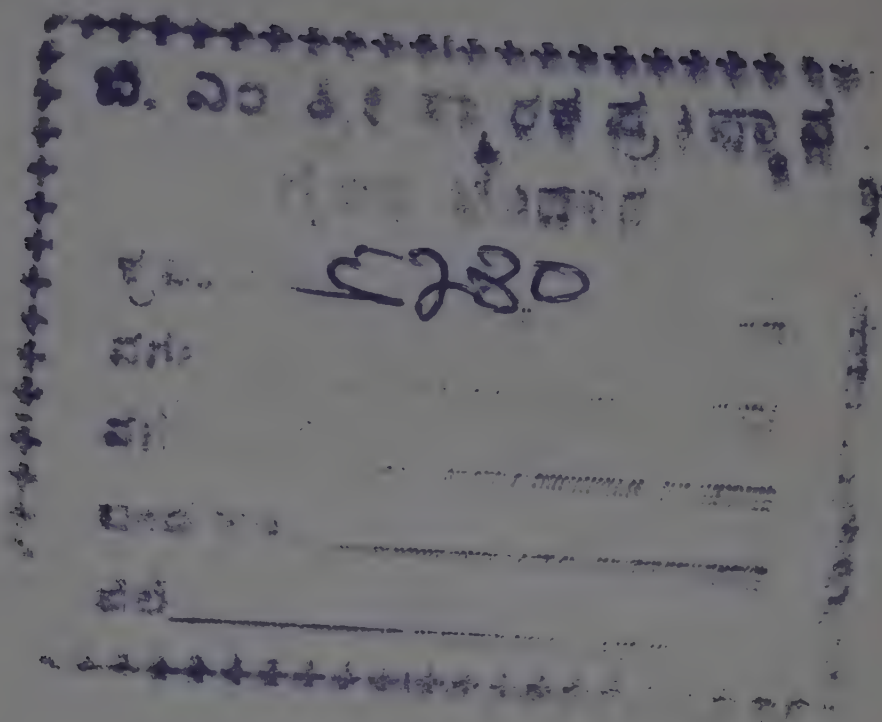
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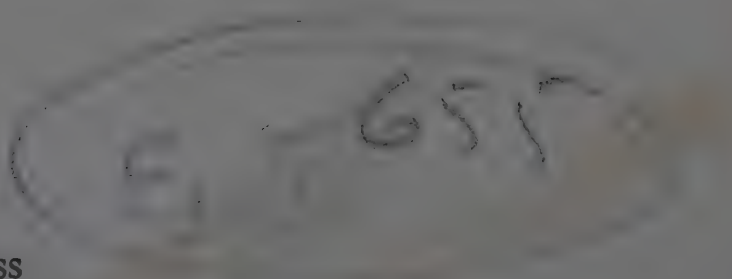
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Dedicated
to
The Sacred Memory
of
My Mother

FOREWORD

This is an important and impeccable book written with singular conviction and remarkable ability since the lectures on the *Gītā* by Sri M. Rangacharya were published. In the essays embodied in this book Prof. S. S. Raghavachar closely follows Śrī Rāmānuja's commentary on the *Gītā*. Śrī Rāmānuja's commentary on the *Gītā* is a Bhāṣya, not a Vyākhyāna or Vṛtti. As such he gives the connection from verse to verse, from chapter to chapter and from Ṣatka to Ṣatka. The author brings out all these in a conspicuous manner.

The *Gītā* presents the tenet that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Person, an Avatār of the Absolute into the world of men. From times immemorial generations of men and women have turned to the *Gītā* for the solution of their personal dilemmas. The *Gītā* affirms the psychological paths of Karma, Jñāna and Bhakti for the solution of the problems of life. The process of ascent is from Karma to Jñāna, from Jñāna to Bhakti. Karma is selfless work without the desire that prompts it normally. Work done in this way stimulates the power of knowledge. Jñāna is the realisation of the self as different from the modes of matter. This discipline prepares the ground for Bhakti. Bhakti is the approach through Love to the Supreme Person. The votaries of Kṛṣṇa enter His being, the Supreme Abode. Thus the *Gītā* affirms the reality of a personal God, the ground and the goal of human existence.

The author presents clearly and concretely the comprehensive ideal of *Gītā* with insight, vision and authority. This is a distinct contribution to the *Gītā* literature.

Swāmi Ādidevānanda.

PREFACE

Convinced, as I am, that the best writing on the *Gītā* is to be found in the traditional commentaries, I offer this brief exposition of the *Gītā-Bhāṣya* of Rāmānuja. This particular interpretation has not entered into the modern understanding of the *Gītā* as much as it ought to. The modern student of the *Gītā* lacks the requisite data in English as Sri Govindāchārya's complete translation has ceased to be available and Dr. Van Buitenen has given only a condensed version. I am trying the experiment of presenting the substance of Rāmānuja's great treatise, duly fulfilling the twin requirements of economy and fidelity and carefully focusing on the basic and distinguishing contributions of the Ācharya. Close correspondence with the original is maintained and in crucial contexts the exposition does the work of a translation as well. The abundant elucidation furnished by Vedānta Deśika is utilized throughout. It is hoped that this new manner of reproducing the rich and profound vision enshrined in the *Bhāṣya* will succeed.

It is in the fitness of things that the work is sponsored under the auspices of the Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Āśrama, Mangalore, where all my major writings took shape under the inspiring guidance of Swāmi Ādidevānānda and the gracious ragement of Swāmi Vijñānānanda and Swāmi Sundānānda. I thank the Swamiji for his benedictory Foreword.

Sri Achyut Kamath of the Sharada Press, justly famous for its fine work, is the main architect of this project and all the credit for this publication goes to his generous zeal and enlightened devotion. One cannot thank him enough.

Let me conclude with the apt prayers of Śrī Vedānta Deśika:

“प्रणामं लक्ष्मणमुनिः प्रतिगृह्णातुमामकं”

“धियं जनयतु स मे देवः श्रीमान् धनंजयसारथिः”

S. S. Raghavachar.

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spiritual wisdom. We have simple translations and condensations of the lines of moral and religious guidance embodied in the work. The metaphysical and ethical questions treated in the *Gītā* are not handled with any thoroughness and rigour and the intention to distil the quintessence of the prescription of the *Gītā* for the practice of the higher life is the dominant one. The indological outlook is set aside and the traditional view of Hinduism concerning the text is adhered to. Knotty issues in interpretation are solved with the aid of some traditional commentaries, mostly the one by Śankara. There is neither the passion for scholarship nor the effort at rethinking. This is a simple view of the *Gītā* as the supreme scripture and the attempt is to appropriate it as such.

There is yet a third variety of writing on the *Gītā*. This emanates from the consciousness of what may be called the 'Modern Predicament'. Convinced of the essential falsity and injuriousness of the anti-religious standpoint in modern thought, some writers endeavour to accomplish what may be called the 'Recovery of Faith'. In this programme of spiritual renaissance, a catholic point of view is adopted and the fundamentals of all the living religions are affirmed both as true and mutually harmonious, confirming and supplementing each other. The *Gītā* is handled as one of the focal classics on which this work of spiritual reconstruction must be based. Anne Besant, Bhagavan Das, Radhakrishnan and Aldous Huxley illustrate this line of approach to the *Gītā*. Much comparative religion and philosophy go into this type of interpretation and parallelisms in the mystical literature of all lands and persuasions are assiduously sought and eagerly pressed into service. There is a congenial breadth of outlook. There is only one conspicuous deficiency in this method. The essential structure of thought embodied in the *Gītā* as such does not receive intensive treatment and the abundant interpretative material available in the traditional Indian com-

mentaries is only touched upon eclectically but their full value is neither realized nor utilized. The preoccupation with the modern crisis and the all too serious estimate of the *Gītā* as necessary for the re-spiritualization of the world do not seem to prevent its being used more as a 'forum' than a 'sanctum' and hence the resultant insufficiency of penetration to the inward essence of the work.

The interpretation of the *Gītā* by Swami Vivekananda, Tilak, Gāndhi and Śrī Aurobindo belongs to a category by itself. Vivekananda has not left us a complete commentary on the *Gītā*. But still we have clear indications in his works of his distinctive interpretation of the message of the work. All the other three have given us definitive statements of their interpretation. It is noteworthy that all these four have contributed, each in his own individual way, to the cause of the regeneration of Modern India, through a life of heroic dedication. Each had a definite philosophic conception of life and its ultimate purpose. By themselves they had remarkable achievements to their credit. Swāmi Vivekānanda re-vivified the philosophy of Vedānta through his life of intense spirituality and worked out on its basis a philosophy of social service. Tilak was an outstanding scholar on the Vedas, the *Mahābhārata* and *Gītā* and had developed a thorough-going philosophy of action inspired by a spiritual vision of Reality. Śrī Aurobindo was an immense power in politics, was an intellectual of soaring genius and later on devoted himself and his unique talents to a life of complete and integral Yoga. He evolved out of his reflections and the life of Yoga, a metaphysic and a system of spirituality, deep-rooted in the ancient tradition but striking and original in its new form, at once profound and comprehensive. Mahatma Gandhi sought ultimate truth in and through life and that very life led him on to a vision of Reality, that was at once a deeply living faith and a source of inspiration for Idealism in

action. They were all prophets and seers. To the understanding of the *Gītā* they brought all their moral power and spiritual perception. The *Gītā* was woven into the texture of their lives and it became a part of their life-stream. Out of that inward assimilation, emerged their understanding and interpretation of its import. No wonder it is thorough and systematic and comes out as an authentic and full-fledged version of the message. Labour, devotion and insight combine to gather a magnificent harvest. Indological cobwebs are not there, the work is not treated as a book of precepts reverently to be accepted, nor is it made a platform for universalist peroration to assuage the world-crisis. What it is in itself, its philosophical substance, receives due consideration. The entire ground is traversed through creative rethinking. There is detailed exegesis, the links of thought are traced, the implicit grounds of doctrines are drawn forth into clear relief and the total pattern of thought is set up in its synoptic grandeur.

TRADITIONAL COMMENTARIES OF THE ĀCHĀRYAS

There is yet another type of exposition, which, unfortunately has not come fully into existence. There have been at least three first rate commentaries on the *Gītā* by the traditional Āchāryas. Śankara's is the first that we have though he refers to many older ones and claims that his motive for working out a new commentary is for removing the prevalent confusion and chaos. He had Indian scholarship at its best in his command and lived through, as it were, the entire text utilizing all his stupendous resources, exegetical, traditional and philosophical. That he was no mere writer of a gloss but a philosopher with a definite philosophic doctrine of his own cannot be counted a disqualification, for it is conceivably a philosophical mind that can grasp the inner purport of a philosophical poem like the *Gītā*. Further, the philo-

sophical doctrine of the commentator is claimed as an authentic product of the teachings of the *Gītā* itself. The body of the text is interpreted in the light of the inner core of its philosophical meaning. Only a philosophical bias external to the work on hand and derived from antecedents independent and alien might give rise to a falsifying exposition. For purposes of coherence, the text here and there might receive interpretations not consonant with its literal and *prima facie* understanding and this grounding of the exegis of the part on the over-ruling idea of the whole is an essentially sound procedure. The assumption of such organic coherence of significance and its use in the course of interpretation can be discredited only after the failure of such a connected interpretation is finally established. The opposite assumption would be too facile and would dismiss a work in advance as an ill-organized patchwork. No great work of either poetry or philosophy is a mere summation of parts each of which parts would disclose its full and final import to ordinary understanding apart from the illuminating matrix of the whole. That a traditional commentary like that of Śankara subordinates detailed exegesis to the unified totality of import is an excellence. If the result of such a sustained effort at coherence still reveals contradictions, then the work on hand may be deemed an ill-assorted assemblage of discordant elements of thought. Not till then is a rational critic entitled to the privilege of the adverse judgment that it is an inconsistent fusion of diverse currents of doctrine. Now all the major commentators, Śankara, Rāmānuja and Mādhva have built up solid structures of interpretation. That they are outstanding philosophers and that they proceed on the assumption of the ultimate coherence of the work are no demerits. It is a lacuna in the modern writings on the *Gītā* that these commentaries are not fully brought into focus and there are no studies devoted to the exposition of these commentaries. It

is true that they are referred to in plenty in the current works; sometimes acceptance or criticism is indicated on general lines or in parts. But that is not doing enough justice to them. The commentary of no Āchārya has received a modern exposition or restatement. The kernal of the argument of the *Gītā* as seen by the Āchāryas has not entered into the body of the modern understanding of the *Gītā*.

It is true that Mahādeva Śāstry, Govindāchārya Swāmi and Prof. Subba Rao have to their credit the English translations of the Bhāṣyas on the *Gītā* by Śankara, Rāmānuja and Mādhva. But mere literal translation does not bring to the possession of the modern student the structure of interpretation in its entirety. There is need for independent studies of these, setting forth the complete body of interpretation of each. It may be asked whether this is a real necessity for the reconstruction and assessment of the philosophy of the *Gītā*. The answer is an emphatic affirmative. First, for securing the most trustworthy and logical interpretation of the work it is undoubtedly necessary to consider all the existing interpretations, both traditional and modern. There is every possibility that by refusing to take account of the older commentaries we may 'deny ourself guidance' and miss the most valid manner of interpreting it. It is not essential to hold that the true interpretation is to be found in the older writings. Nor is it sound to reject them in advance and to pin our faith dogmatically to the recent expositions. All that is necessary is a complete review of the available expository literature for purposes of a final crystalization of interpretation. A consideration of all the existing attempts to construe the import of the work is absolutely necessary even for pronouncing dissatisfaction with them and to plan for a new venture at understanding. Secondly, in order to evaluate the philosophy of the work it is equally necessary to survey the different approaches to its meaning. A hasty evaluation, by

way of either praise or depreciation, not taking into account all the interpretations and not settling which among them is the soundest, would be worthless. A limited acquaintance with the modes of reconstructing its philosophy, may issue either in a baseless appreciation or an equally baseless disparagement. Superficial and fragmentary knowledge may lead us to extoll or discredit it for wrong reasons. Third, for a comprehension of the systems of Śankara, Rāmānuja and Mādhva, the study of their expositions of the *Gītā* is a necessity. The Upaniṣads and the *Brahma-Sūtras* offer to their interpreter not much scope for developing a philosophy of conduct and spiritual self-culture. The *Gītā* is the work in particular in the realm of Vedānta that lays down the plan of life for realizing the ultimate good. This practical emphasis is not so fully present in the other two texts. Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita, leaving out their respective interpretations of the *Gītā* would be substantially impoverished and would lack the doctrine of the way of life. So for both the understanding and appraisal of the different systems of Vedānta, their renderings of the philosophy of the *Gītā* must be taken into consideration. Hence attempts to expound the traditional commentaries on the *Gītā* are fundamentally justified.

The Vedāntins of all schools regard three works as the basic classics for Vedānta. They are the *Upaniṣads*, *Brahma-Sūtras* and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. There is an explanatory idea, a principle, behind this unbroken tradition. The Upaniṣads are preeminently and in the primary sense the books of Vedānta. In fact the name Vedānta is collectively applied to them. The principal Upaniṣads supposed to be taken note of by the author of the *Brahma-Sūtras* and explicitly interpreted and utilized by the pioneering Āchāryas constitute this basic document of Vedānta. These works contain the loftiest conceptions, the final wisdom of what may be characterized in

general as Vedic philosophy. But the Upaniṣadas are many, and are cast in language which is very ancient, enigmatical and often paradoxical. The several texts seem to be setting forth divergent moods and metaphysical ideas and sometimes even single major Upaniṣads like the *Chāndōgya* and *Bṛihadāraṇyaka* seem to be records of diverse uncoordinated points of view. They impress us as illuminating leaps of philosophical intuitions but the grounds of these are seldom set down and what could be said in opposition to them is scarcely anticipated or answered. In short, we are struck by their great ineffable brilliance but are not in a position to appropriate their wisdom fully. They arouse the keenest demand for elucidation, co-ordination and justifying elaboration. The *Brahma-Sūtras* come to the scene at this stage of the evolution of Vedānta and they supply the dialectical and substantiating frame-work of thought underlying the Upaniṣads. Their function is to co-ordinate the teachings and set forth the logical justification of the doctrines advanced. They work out lines of interconnection and modes of critical vindication. Reason is the supreme instrument in this process. This characteristic of the work is manifest in the very nature of each section trying to solve a problem and develop a decisive conclusion in answer to the challenge of a *prima facie* view. It is for this very reason that the first aphorism characterizes the work as of the nature of a *Jijñāsa* or inquiry. It is perhaps this idea that the author of the *Gītā* has in mind when he describes the *Brahma-Sūtra* as 'reasoned' and as issuing in decisive conclusions. But something more by way of textual completion is needed. The *Sūtras* embody the barest logical principles. They justify and co-ordinate but the substance of thought as thus justified and co-ordinated remains unformulated. The central inspiration and the lofty poetry of the Upaniṣadic utterances have to be regathered and reduced to a single statement eschewing the dialectical and synthesiz-

ing scaffold. There is a clear necessity for the condensation of the positive essence that emerges out of this justifying ratiocination. Only thus can *Vedānta* secure unity of effect and consolidation of theme. The *Gītā* is the fulfilment of this fundamental necessity. It is a consolidated restatement of the vision of the Upaniṣads in their very style and living idiom. If the Upaniṣads represent revelation, and the *Brahma-Sūtras* represent the justifying philosophical argumentation, the *Gītā* represents the re-revelation of the truth emerging out of the justification. In the language of Indian logic the Upaniṣads declare the *pratijñā*, the sūtras add the *Hetu* and the *Gītā* gives the *Nigamana*. It unifies and does the summing up in the full-blooded inspirational manner of the source-books. This in principle is the outlook governing the adoption and utilization of the three basal texts.

The three texts offer to the commentators three distinct types of opportunities and elicit from them three distinct, types of literary production. The Upaniṣads put them to the necessity of exercising their exegetical competence to its utmost. The *Brahma-Sūtra* challenges them to exercise their metaphysical and logical powers fully to work out consistent, adequate and logically sustainable systems of thought. The *Gītā* calls for a different kind of talent and provides scope for a unique type of philosophical self-expression. Being comparatively a more intelligible text, neither archaic nor mystifying, it raises far fewer exegetical difficulties. Being non-dialectical in character and wholly concerned in presenting the positive essentials, its commentator is not called upon to engage in controversies either destructive or constructive. It is the *Song Celestial*, with a commanding architecture of its own and a fervour of the highest mystical poetry. It is many-sided and all-inclusive in its theme, being at once metaphysical, ethical, and religious. It delineates the ontological ultimates, draws up pictures of ideal life and offers comprehensive direc-

tions for ethical and spiritual realization. Only a mind gifted for synoptic reconstruction and mystical elevation of spirit, equally at home in the realms of philosophical contemplation and ethical and spiritual idealism could render some measure of justice to the great work. No wonder therefore that the great Vedāntic Āchāryas have produced manysided masterpieces in their writings on the *Gītā*. Their whole genius is called into operation in interpreting the work. If for nothing else, in order to appreciate these great minds at their all-round excellence, and in their fully integrated self-utterance, the way they enter into and unfold the *Gītā* in their commentaries has to be studied closely and thoroughly. This may be taken as the fourth reason for undertaking an intensive consideration of the commentaries on the *Gītā* by the Āchāryas.

INTRODUCING ŚRĪ RĀMĀNUJA'S COMMENTARY

A provisional statement of the focal points of such a study or the direction of evaluation is quite possible. To do justice to the commentaries a fourfold criterion may be applied.

1. How far does the interpretation succeed in exhibiting the work as an ordered whole, tracing lines of interconnection in the structure of its argument?

2. How far does it succeed in doing justice to all its parts and phases? Or how far does it assimilate into the body of its thought with all due emphasis all the varied moments and aspects of the teaching embodied in the work?

3. How far does it succeed in articulating the theoretical or metaphysical fundamentals set forth in the treatise? Or with what clarity and comprehensiveness does it expound the doctrines of Nature, the individual soul and God enshrined in the work? Answer to this question decides the metaphysical adequacy of a commentary.

4. How far does it succeed in working out a unified presentation of the pathways to spiritual fulfilment delineated in the course of the work? The answer to this question decides the adequacy of the interpretation as a guide to spiritual life.

With this preamble one may enter upon the study of the commentaries. The present undertaking aims at the study of the commentary by Rāmānuja. The choice implies no judgment with regard to the other interpretations. It is dictated purely by the consideration that Rāmānuja's Bhāṣya is as good as any other to start with. There is also some consideration of advantage. Śankara's commentary, purely from the formal point of view, offers considerable difficulty. It is direct and lucid on the whole, in its interpretation of the major part of the text. But it enters into elaborate and intricate polemical discussions at the crucial points of the text and converts the commentary into something like a commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*. Rāmānuja avoids such polemics except in two contexts. This is a feature that tempts study by the very prospect of minimum difficulty. Mādhva has left two works in exposition of the *Gītā* and a full study of Madhva's interpretation of the *Gītā* necessitates an equally intensive consideration of both. The task is not easy and forbids facile venture. Rāmānuja's is free from this difficulty also and hence the task is made doubly tempting. There are two substantial aids to the study of Rāmānuja's Bhāṣya. Yāmuna, his preceptor's preceptor, has summarized in a masterly way the teachings of the *Gītā* in thirty two fine and lucid verses and they set for Rāmānuja the direction for his work which he follows and elaborates in his commentary. His commentary in its turn has received magnificent elucidation and amplification by Vedānta-Deśika in his *Tātparyachandrikā*. Thus the work of expounding Rāmānuja's interpretation of the *Gītā* is made attractive by this ready availability of very good supporting literature.

RĀMĀNUJA'S INTRODUCTION TO THE GĪTĀ

After recording his grateful homage to Yāmuna, Rāmānuja propounds in a comprehensive sentence what he conceives to be the situation in which the *Gīta* emerged into being and its principal theme.

The fundamental factor in the situation is God. He is the supreme Reality and attaining Him is the Supreme goal. The nature of the supreme Reality is brought out in a systematic array of significant adjectives. That the infinite Reality is the object of all spiritual aspiration and endeavour is brought out in the very statement of the nature of God. God in His fundamental nature is beyond the reach of souls caught up in the meshes of Māyā. This theory of Māyā is to be elucidated in the *Gītā* itself in the sequel. To resolve this crisis, God descends to the realm of mortals out of his compassion by His own initiative and reveals Himself in numberless incarnations. The motive behind such self-disclosure is to sustain the souls in the agony of search for Him by furnishing them with the object of their adoration. The unknown and inaccessible Deity presents itself before its seekers and nourishes their devotion by setting before them the object of their devotion. It is a self-gift on God's part and He is the active principle in the resulting communion and worship. This conception of Avatār is also to be elucidated in the sequel. God in His particular incarnation as Kṛṣṇa is the teacher of the *Gītā*. While imparting his message to Arjuna, he is addressing the whole world of creatures struggling for liberation. The theme of the message is Bhakti directed towards Him and Bhakti that has been enunciated in Vedānta as the supreme pathway to God-realization. This Bhakti is to be developed through Jñāna and Karma. While the general purpose of incarnations is to make Himself accessible to devotion, the special function discharged by Kṛṣṇa as the teacher of the

Gītā is an additional one of imparting wisdom concerning devotion. God is indeed the central fact of the situation. He is the supreme Being, the supreme goal. He is the compassionately active object of devotion descending to the vision of the mortals to sustain their devotion by self-revelation and the teacher of the pathway of devotion to be directed to Him. Thus does God in his descent as Kṛṣṇa effectuate the descent of the Yoga of Bhakti to our world.

This rough rendering of the introduction brings out neither the concentrated force of the original nor the wealth of implications carried by the idea of God in Rāmānuja's thought, which he conveys through the string of pregnant epithets majestically woven into his introductory sentence. But the introduction is a condensed anticipation of the fundamentals of the commentary which receive detailed substantiation as the work progresses. It is unnecessary to dwell on the points raised by it or to expound the nature of God as outlined in it at this stage. It is enough if its orientation is noted clearly. That consists of the affirmation of the supreme Reality, named here Brahman, Puruṣōttama and Nārāyaṇa and of the second affirmation that Bhakti towards that principle is the central theme of the philosophy of the *Gītā*.

RĀMĀNUJA'S ANALYSIS OF THE ŚTRUCTURE OF THE GĪTĀ

It is appropriate at this stage to consider Rāmānuja's analysis of the structure of the *Gītā*. The fundamental theme of the *Gītā* according to him is the doctrine of Bhakti as leading to the attainment of the highest Reality. How this theme is set forth in the course of the work according to him is worth consideration. The eighteen chapters of the work are divided into three groups, each group consisting of six chapters. The first six chapters are, in Rāmānuja's opinion,

devoted to the exposition of the method of self-realization on the part of the individual self. The proper order of progression in this process consists of the intellectual understanding of the nature of the self, the pursuit of Karma-yoga and then Jñānayoga. Jñāna-yoga leads to an immediate and direct apprehension or vision of the nature of the self. The second group of six chapters deals with Bhaktiyoga, which issues out of the self-realization described in the first group. As the object of this Bhakti is God, His nature, attributes and glory are also dealt with in this central group. Thus the first group is really preparatory and instrumental to the second group. The third group accomplishes an intellectual clarification of the matter thus far propounded. It clarifies the nature of prakṛiti, puruṣa and puruṣōttama, the three metaphysical entities and determines the absolute supremacy of the third entity. It also clarifies the nature of Karma, Jñāna and Bhakti bringing out the ultimacy of Bhakti and discusses several other issues also connected with these. This is the general scheme of analysis. This is followed by an analysis of the contents of each chapter and the rationale of the sequence of chapters is also exhibited. How the three groups and the eighteen chapters converge and establish the central contention of the work is brought out in the analysis laid down first of all by Yāmuna and then elaborated by Rāmānuja. This is a striking structural analysis of the work, which does justice to the distinctive contribution of each chapter, renders the sequence and development of argument logically intelligible and demonstrates the resultant unity of final import. It is also an analysis which clearly points to the elements of metaphysics in the work and the elements that relate to Sādhana or the practical realization of the ultimate good.

OUTLINE OF THE PHILOSOPHIC POSITION

A general indication of the fundamental philosophical doctrines of Rāmānuja may facilitate the comprehension of his commentary on the *Gītā*. While a detailed presentation is neither necessary nor possible at this stage, it is doubtful whether the interpretation of the *Gītā* can be followed satisfactorily without an acquaintance with the basic frame-work of the system. The frame-work gets amplification and philosophical support as the work progresses and its complete vindication is the theme of Rāmānuja's *Vedārtha-Samgraha* and the commentary on the *Sūtras*.

It is a cardinal principle of the system to view the contents of philosophy as falling into three fundamental departments of inquiry. They are attempts to answer three questions (1) What is ultimate Reality? (2) What is the supreme good? (3) What is the method and way to realise the Supreme good? In answer to these, we have the doctrine of Tattva or Reality, the doctrine of puruṣārtha or the good and the doctrine of Hita or the way of realization. As philosophy must be critical and self-conscious, its affirmations on these heads must be built upon methodologically sound foundations and hence a logical and epistemological base must also be supplied in any sound philosophical construction.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL

The school admits three fundamental sources of knowledge. They are pratyakṣa, anumāna and śabda. There is an attempt to support the truthful character of each of these ways of knowing in their specific fields. With regard to error the school takes up an extremely realistic position and holds error to be merely inadequate apprehension. This inadequacy is revealed by contradictions and the stultifica-

tion of effort in the practical sphere based upon such inadequate understanding of facts. Truth is the intrinsic and spontaneous character of all apprehension; coherence theoretical and pragmatic only serves to reinforce the intrinsic claim to truth of cognitions, by removing doubts and contrary conceptions. Among the three sources of knowledge, revelation constituted of the Vedas and in particular, the Upaniṣads, is our sole authority for the knoweledge of ultimate Reality. But revelation must be interpreted according to rational canons of interpretation and must be demonstrated to be non-contradictory of other sources of knowledge and be itself self-consistent. It should also be of such a character as to supply knowledge not accessible through other sources. Thus it must fill a genuine gap in our empirically and inferentially acquired knowledge. Further, the attempt to work out a satisfactory conception of reality excluding the insight furnished by revelation must be demonstrated to break down hopelessly. It is under such severe logical reservations that revelation must be adopted. It would be unphilosophical to discredit it when it satisfies these tests. Such scepticism, if honestly pursued, would demolish all knowledge and would eventually cancel itself also. Intellectual progress ultimately consists of advance from partial knowledge to fuller knowledge and the latter wholly incorporates into itself the former. The guiding principle in this process is the criterion of coherence theoretical and practical. The incoherent is the incomplete and the achievement of coherence marks the gaining of fuller insight into reality. This impulse to self-completion on the part of human understanding propelled by the criterion of coherence reaches its fullness of satisfaction in the knowledge acquired from Vedāntic revelation. Revelation is neither an alternative, nor an antithesis, nor a mere supplement to empirical knowledge gained through perceptual and inferential processes. It is a completion and fulfilment of it.

It's claim to validity ultimately rests upon this characteristic of completeness. While the Upaniṣads are the primary repositories of revelation, they are supplemented by the works of sages and saints, such as the smṛitis, itihāsas, purāṇa and the āgamas. Among these supplementary texts, judged from every point of view, the *Gītā* stands supreme.

Thus the conception of truth as intrinsic to human understanding, the application of the criterion of coherence in both its aspect as non-contradiction and in its aspect as the untenability of the opposite, the theory of error as fragmentary apprehension, the admission of all the three and only three sources of knowledge and the view of revelation as both true and as a perfection of knowledge are the principal epistemological tenets of the system.

METAPHYSICAL

The standard mode of characterizing Viśiṣṭādvaitic theory of reality is to say that it upholds a doctrine of three realities. The statement must be supplemented considerably in order to be made quite accurate and fully true. The three ontological principles are not held to be separate verities. They are organically inter-connected and among the three, one reality is fundamental and substantive and the other two are adjectival to it and subsist in the status of subordination.

The three reals are physical nature in its totality, the individual and finite souls in all grades of development and the infinite spirit or Brahman.

That physical nature is real and is a genuine part of the total structure of reality is a cardinal principle of the school. It is in this connection that the postulate of Māyā implying the phenomenality of it is discarded through much argumentation. But this assertion of its reality is not followed up by any idea that it is the whole of reality or that it is self-explanatory.

It is not explanatory of the souls and is not itself independent in its being or processes. It is wholly dependant upon, under the control of and subservient to the purposes of the supreme spirit. It forms a part of the total realm of divine glory.

The finite selves are many and their individuality and plurality are intrinsic to them. They are not either the products of matter or the phenomenal appearances of the supreme. They are eternal and are characterized by consciousness in its dual character of self-consciousness and consciousness of the rest of reality consisting of nature, the other selves and God. This latter aspect of consciousness is curtailed in the state of what is called bondage and attains full extension in the state of Mokṣa or release. Joy or the feeling of self-satisfaction beginning from the faint glimmerings of mundane pleasure and rising to the highest bliss of perfection, is nothing different from this consciousness itself. Knowledge of truth is itself a state of happiness. Hence it is said in ancient texts that the nature of the self consists of knowledge and joy. The self is also a centre of self-initiated activity and it is in this aspect that moral autonomy and responsibility are inalienable attributes of the self. In their natural and perfect state to be attained in release the selves are equal and in the mundane condition they are subject to adventitious inequalities. The selves are not only immortal but pass through countless births or lives in accordance with a rigorous law of justice. This is a consequence of the principle of moral self-determination and the operation of the law keeps open opportunities for moral betterment in the future. The cycle of such transmigration comes to an end only when the self in question attains Life Eternal. Even as physical nature is neither all-explanatory nor self-sufficient, the finite self is also wholly dependent upon, under the control of, and subservient to the purposes of the supreme spirit. It forms a part of the realm of Divine glory.

The third category and in fact the fundamental metaphysical principle is called Brahman in the prevailing language of the Upaniṣads, called Puruṣōttama in the fifteenth chapter of the *Gītā* and is referred to as Viṣṇu, Vāsudēva and Nārāyaṇa in the Vaiṣṇava scriptures. Īśwara or God would be a general term and is frequently used in this context. This ultimate reality is no impersonal principle but is decidedly personal. God is the supreme person, infinitely knowing, infinitely joyous, all-inclusive in every sense, temporal, spacial and ontological, and transcendent of all imperfection, by way of mutation or limitation of powers. He is the home of all perfections, all attributes constitutive of excellence. Here the question arises whether it is right to regard a being with attributes as ultimate. The contention of the school is that to be real is to have attributes and that an *attributeless being* is a contradiction in terms. It is unnecessary at this stage to review this discussion. The attributes are metaphysical, moral and aesthetic. The first set indicates the majesty and the power, the exalted metaphysical fullness and infinitude of God. The second set forms the aspect of God's compassion and love and the consequent accessibility of the Deity. The infinite Real is also infinite love. The third set concerns the aspect of beauty and sublimity. This threefold richness of content makes for both transcendence and immanence. God transcends the realm of finite reals, nature and individual selves by His very perfection and sustains them from within as their immanent inner soul, by virtue of His very infinitude. It is this relation that is brought out in the unique conception of the school that God is the ultimate soul and the finite reals constitute his body. The body is that which is supported, controlled and used by the soul for its own purpose. Dependence in being, derivativeness in activity and teleological subordination are held to be the characteristics of the body. From that standpoint the universe eminently fits into the

definition. It is also described as adjectival to God, as prakāra or viśeṣaṇa. Thus ultimately there is only one reality, Brahman, characterized by infinite attributes and adjectival entities. Attempts to do away with attributes would nullify the reality of the principle, attempts to deny the reality of the world of finites would bring in the untenable hypothesis of cosmic illusionism, thereby converting the infinite spirit to an erring finite mind, and to discard the category of personality in the notion of ultimate reality is to despiritualize it. To be spiritual is to be personal and personāity or self-hood is realized to fullness only in the Supreme spirit.

CONCERNING THE PURUṢĀRTHAS OR GOALS OF LIFE

Without explicitly doing away with the traditional classification of the goals of life as Dharma, Artha, Kāma, and Mokṣa and in a way assimilating it, the school offers a scheme of three goals. They are material prosperity or Aiśwarya, Kaivalya or the realization of the intrinsic greatness of the self and Mokṣa or realization of God.

The first one signifies mundane and physical happiness and it includes worldly prosperity as well as heavenly pleasures after death as conceived in popular religion. That this ideal means only limited and transitory happiness is brought out repeatedly.

The second goal is a little difficult to conceive. It means the realization by the self of its own essential and intrinsic nature as transcending the body and as consisting of pure knowledge or consciousness. It is recovery by the self of its own innate greatness as a spiritual principle. It is also transitory according to one interpretation of the school which looks upon it as a provisional stage leading to the third ideal. According to another it is an abiding condition after one has attained it and it consists of what may be called self-posses-

sion and self-enjoyment. Both interpretations agree in condemning it as unworthy and as immeasurably inferior to the third ideal. That the finite individual could reach self-fulfilment in and through itself, however complete its release from matter, is an utter impossibility. It is unnecessary to dwell on the worthlessness and self-contradictory character of this ideal. The third ideal signifies in the first place release from the entanglement with matter which suppresses the natural powers of the self. In the second place it consists of the liberation of the natural powers of the self, particularly its fundamental attribute of knowledge. In the third place it means the fullest employment of the natural power of knowledge in gaining and maintaining a direct apprehension of God. Since this is the proper and ideal exercise of the natural excellence of the self, the apprehension grows into an unlimited and uninterrupted joy. While to know the real is joy for a being whose basic nature is to know, knowledge of the infinite Reality is indeed infinite joy. The joy is so over-whelming as to induce and bring about the surrender of the subject of experience to the object in total self-dedication. Thus the experience of Mokṣa consists of the experiential knowledge of God, love of God and the final offering of oneself to the eternal service of God. Attainment of and union with God in this fullness of experience is the essence of perfection according to the school.

CONCERNING SĀDHANA OR WAYS OF REALISATION

The ways and directions of effort for progressing towards the ideal are to be determined in the light of the nature of the realities concerned in the process, the goal to be attained and hindrances or obstacles that are responsible for its non-attainment. Without going into their particulars we may note that Rāmānuja decides in favour of Jñāna or

knowledge as against the claims of Karma or action to be the ultimate means of release. Mere action prompted by worldly desires binds and action without the limiting adjunct of such desires can only lead to a higher state of mind and greater fitness for knowledge. So through knowledge lies the road to liberation. This knowledge is not mere understanding or intellectual and mediate cognition. It is knowledge that has taken on the character of meditation. It would be erroneous to identify this liberating knowledge with the immediate experience of Brahman, for that experience is no mere Sādhana, but is the fulfilment and fruition of the process of Sādhana. So it is knowledge of the nature of meditation that meets the requirements of the present situation. What kind of meditation is it? Is there any further specification of its nature? Rāmānuja argues on the basis of certain texts of the Upaniṣads that mere meditation is futile and that only the grace of God can bring about the realization of Brahman. Is grace arbitrary or universal? It is not the latter, for in that case there would have been no bondage and no necessity for any Sādhana. Nor is it a matter of irrational caprice, for that would be a negation of Divine nature. Grace, therefore, must be construed as something that comes into actual operation in relation to some special worth or quality of the aspirant. That appropriate condition explanatory of the descent of grace Rāmānuja identifies with love or longing for God. God's will to save is always there as an eternal actuality but it is kept waiting, as it were, as a mere potentiality, till the second condition is fulfilled, namely, the aspirants' desire for redemption, by way of love of God. The fulfilment of the second condition is necessary, for God treats the self not as a thing but as a person and it is creation's 'main miracle' that the creature is endowed with autonomy and initiative, that he cannot even be released against his will. Even the redemptive plan of God fructifies only through the voluntary

and autonomous movement of the creature towards redemption. There is beauty and reality in this kind of spiritual progress, though it contains hazards and hardships. Externally imposed perfection is bondage rather than freedom. Therefore the meditation that can bring about liberation must be of the nature of love. The Upaniṣadic doctrine of grace, according to Rāmānuja, calls for this interpretation. Meditation of the nature of loving contemplation is Bhakti. There is also a further element in Bhakti. It is not rightly described as love. It must be called adoration. The devotee must hold himself as living, moving and having his being for the sake of the object of his devotion. It is worshipful love, it is object-centred and not subject-centred attachment. It is love for the sake of the beloved and in service of the beloved. The enjoyment of the devotee is consequent upon and is in proportion to this spirit of self-abnegation to the Deity.

There is continuity, it is easy to see, between the ideal to be realized and the means adopted. The contemplative knowledge, love and surrender constitutive of the means of attainment correspond to what they lead to, the state of fulfilment, constituted of the direct vision of God, love born of that vision and the dedication impelled by that love. What transforms the instrumental phase of experience into the ideal phase of experience, the means into the end, is the redemptive self-revelation of the supreme Being, who is the self-same object of adoration in both the phases.

Bhakti of the required type, adequate to bring down the grace of God to its redemptive operation, is itself a high Ideal. It is second in loftiness to only Mukti. It is itself to be attained through appropriate self-culture. Taking pleasure only in the contemplation of God and feeling exalted in the mood of self-surrender to Him, require a clear awareness and direct realization of the nature of the self, as different from its physical encrustations, as of the innate nature of

knowledge and as so constituted that its fullness of being lies in subservience to Him. It is only the pure self that could have the right aspiration. The intellectual and meditative discipline bringing about this proper self-vision, this coming into possession by the self of its own essential nature as transcending the body, as having knowledge for its natural excellence and as capable of self-fulfilment through dedication to God, is what is termed Jñāna-yoga by Rāmānuja. From Jñāna-yoga emerges self-discovery and from self-discovery emerges Bhakti-yoga.

That the inward life, the intellectual discipline, which in its maturity facilitates and brings about the required self-discovery needs tranquillity and freedom from sensuous distraction and externally induced inertia, is an obvious fact. These well-known obstacles to the tranquil pursuit of self-knowledge are not accidents or workings of fate; they are in reality the consequences of the operation of the law of moral causation. Our deeds of the past, acts of depravity conditioned by earth-bound desires, are responsible for them. The effects of such a past, in the form of hindrances to the contemplative life, can be suppressed only by a life of virtue, for its own sake. A life of disinterested ethical endeavour in the present is the only effective antidote to an evil past that has engendered the present hindrances to the cultivation of the inward life. Such a life, at once disinterested and full of zest and activity, is what is termed Karma-yoga. It is this Karma-yoga that produces the psychological equipment for Jñāna-yoga. Thus does Karma-yoga come into the scheme of Sādhana as conceived by Rāmānuja.

Thus the order of progression is clear now. Karma-yoga paves the way for Jñāna-yoga and Jñāna-yoga through its fruition in self-realization brings about Bhakti-yoga. Bhakti-yoga is the final and immediate pathway to the ultimate goal of life.

Another factor, another technique as it were, is uniquely valued in the school in this context and it is called prapatti or śaraṇāgati. It means self-surrender to God. This is to be differentiated from the self-dedication that is an integral part of the realized ideal of Mokṣa and also from the element of service that is part of the total reality of Bhakti. It is self-surrender as a means or pathway to God-realization. It consists of a total surrender of one's burden and responsibility to God in the matter of achieving one's goal. The full significance of this principle is to be discussed at a later stage. It is an all-sufficient, omnipotent and unfailing means. It can be used as a preliminary to the emergence of Bhakti when the requisite foundations of Bhakti are not there. It can also be used when one is already progressing by way of Bhakti but is not convinced of the adequacy of his Bhakti. It can also be adopted as an alternative to Bhakti and for achieving through it what accrues from Bhakti. Its efficacy is all-embracing. It can bring about Bhakti, can complete the work of Bhakti when the latter is inadequate and can also by itself bring to actualization the ultimate ideal of Mokṣa independent of the arduous process of Bhakti. This conception of prapatti is a special and outstanding contribution of Rāmānuja to the theory of Sādhana.

CHAPTER ONE

The theme of the first chapter of the *Gītā* extends beyond it and covers about ten verses of the second chapter. This portion of the work pictures the dramatic setting of the work in the body of the Epic. The presentation of the situation is vivid and arresting and introduces us to some of the leading personalities. It particularly brings before our mind's eye Dhṛitarāṣṭra, Sanjaya, Suyōdhana, Drōṇa, Bhiṣma, Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The later part of the narrative is focused on Arjuna and his extraordinary psychological turmoil. The teaching of the whole book is for resolving the crisis in his soul and in answer to his poignantly expressed enquiry addressed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The two armies are facing each other in battle array and are about to start action in the field called Kurukṣetra. The battle-field is also called Dharma-kṣetra. Vcdānta Deśika explains the word as signifying the place of righteousness, the holy ground of a sacrifice in the form of war. It may be the epithet indicates the spirit of an ideal warfare.

The blind king naturally eager for news asks Sanjaya as to what his people and the sons of Pāṇdu did after thus arranging themselves in hostile formations ready for action. Rāmānuja comments that his blindness was not merely physical but that he suffered from inner blindness of soul also. The remark acquires significance in the light of the role of the King in relation to the present conflict as depicted in the Epic.

Sanjaya plunges into the narration of subsequent happenings and his words are not without the implication that the King's hopes of his sons' victory are futile. Suyōdhana approaches his preceptor, Drōṇa, and points to him the

distinguished heroes on both sides. It is not a pointless conversation. He confesses to Drōṇa that the army of his enemies appears to him to be adequate for winning the war while his own army seems inadequate for the purpose. He concludes by appealing to Drōṇa and other important warriors that they should take appropriate positions all round and do their best to protect Bhīṣma, the general. The speech reveals that for Suyōdhana the only concern was the winning of the war and that he was haunted by feelings of uncertainty and even anxiety with regard to its ultimate issue.

With a view to cheer him up and inspire in him confidence and hope, the great Bhīṣma raises a mighty war-cry, called the 'lion's roar' in the military parlance of the times and sounds his conch. Catching the signal and following his lead the whole army of the Kauravās bursts into a tumultuous roar.

Taking up the challenge as it were, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, seated on their magnificent charriot pulled by white horses blew their divine conches, Pāñchajanya and Devadatta. Following them, all the principal warriors on their side blew their conches. This mighty roar filled the earth and sky and it looked as if it tore the hearts of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. They feared that they were already over-powered. Thus did Sanjaya report to the king, eager for news of a hopeful character.

Then Arjuna, facing the enemies in positions of combat and ready to hurl weapons of destruction, spoke to his charioteer, Śrī Kṛṣṇa: "Oh Achyuta, take my chariot to the middle, in between the two forces, so that I may have a good view of those ranged against us. Let me survey those who have come to fight in the interests of the evil-minded son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and with whom I have to fight in the ensuing-war."

Even as Bhīṣma, Drōṇa and all other Kings were looking on, Kṛṣṇa took the chariot to the middle as he was directed and said "Pārtha! See the assembled Kurus".

When Arjuna saw the warriors, he had a shocking revelation. He saw his preceptors, venerable elders of his family, cousins and friends and those who were like sons to him. The entire host seemed to consist of his kith and kin and others bound to him by a thousand ties of affection. No one that mattered seemed to be an alien. He was overcome by a sudden upsurge of love and compassion. The *Gītā* says that 'great compassion' entered into him and took possession of him. With acute agony of soul he spoke out his mind to his beloved charioteer.

"Seeing my own people here, gathered in this fashion for a decisive battle, my nerves fail me wholly. The weapons slip away from my hands and I am unable to remain steady. My mind seems to be reeling. I see adverse indications and I see no good in destroying our own people. I do not desire victory, nor kingdom, nor happiness. Of what use is kingdom, or pleasures or even life? Those for whose sake, we desire kingdom, possessions and pleasures, are here renouncing all their wealth and even life. I do not want to kill these, the preceptors, fathers, sons, grand-fathers, uncles, fathers-in-law, grand-sons, brothers-in-law and other relatives, even if they are prepared to kill me. Even for securing over-lordship of the three worlds, I will not take up arms against them; least of all for the sake of the earthly kingdom. What satisfaction will we get by killing the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra? On the contrary we will be perpetrating only sin. They blinded by greed may not see the sin in the destruction of kith and kin. But how can we, who do see it, not know how to withdraw from this heinous action? When a people are subjected to this slaughter the eternal morals of the people are overthrown. When morals are destroyed unrighteousness will overtake the people. Under the reign of unrighteousness women become corrupt. When women are corrupt there will be promiscuous mixing up of castes. Such a mixing up will land

the destroyers of the people and the people also in hell. The manes denied of proper oblations will also be degraded. Such chaos will further ruin the eternal morals of the people and the castes. We have heard that a people bereft of these morals will go to hell positively. Alas! we are resolved to commit a dreadful sin, out of infatuation for the pleasures of kingship, that of annihilating our own people. Were these sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra to take up arms against me, while I am unarmed and do not retaliate and kill me, I look upon that eventuality itself as a greater good for me”.

The nature of Arjuna’s reaction to a direct view of the confronting warriors reveals his fundamental character and disposition according to Rāmānuja. Its striking contrast to the reaction of Suyodhana should not be missed. Arjuna, says Rāmānuja, is large-hearted, excessively compassionate, given to extend his ‘consciousness of kind’ over as large a part of humanity as he possibly could, not liable to loosen it, in spite of receiving only hatred, deceit and harm and highly alive to the call of righteousness. Though, he along with his brothers, was sought to be destroyed through so many dreadful plots by the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, realizing now that through the aid of Śrī Kṛṣṇa he can get rid of them once for all in this war, he is filled only with friendly feelings, great compassion and the fear that he may be morally wrong in the course of action undertaken. This inner upsurge works a terrific havoc even on his body and it seems to be withering away in sheer anguish. Saying “I will not fight on any account” and overcome by the prospect of separation from those whom he sees as dear and near to him, he throws down his bow and arrows and sits down in the middle of the chariot abandoning the fighting platform. Here the first chapter comes to a close but its main subject-matter gets completed in the early section of the next chapter. Seeing Arjuna in this pathetic predicament Śrī Kṛṣṇa objects to his giving way to this misplaced

sorrow and admonishes him to give it up. He characterizes it as arising at an inappropriate situation, not of the kind that wise men would entertain, obstructive of a heavenly future, inglorious, very petty and born of faint-heartedness. He exhorts him to arise for battle.

This summary exhortation does not have any effect and the problem of Arjuna is too deep for any superficial treatment. Arjuna implores to be understood. "How can I" he asks, "kill revered personages like Bhīṣma and Drōṇa who are to be venerated by me? How can I kill them, who are attached to the things of pleasure, and then sit on their seats, as it were, and enjoy those very things of pleasure mixed with their blood?" He further crystallizes his basic issue. "If you were to argue that the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra will overpower and kill us on our retiring from action, I feel that death at their hands, they not knowing how to distinguish right and wrong is far better for us than that unrighteous victory that would come to us if we kill them. I do not see anything that would assuage our all-devouring grief if we were to kill them, even if our victory brought us unrivalled sovereignty over the whole earth or the realm of the very gods." Arjuna, thus utterly downcast, surrendered himself to Śrī Kṛṣṇa with these words "I surrender to you, I am your disciple, enlighten me as to what you judge to be good for me".

According to Rāmānuja from this point starts the actual teaching by Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He addresses himself to Arjuna's problem and this time goes to the very root of the matter. He unfolds an entire philosophy. Before proceeding further it will help our understanding of the situation invoking the descent of the *Gītā*, as it were, if we sum up the fundamental elements in the psychological crisis of Arjuna in the light of Rāmānuja's analysis.

1. He is overwhelmed by great feelings of misplaced affection and friendship.

2. He feels an irresistible upsurge of misplaced compassion to the combatants.

3. He is confused with regard to what is right and wrong, righteousness and unrighteousness.

4. In that mood of hopeless anguish and moral uncertainty he submits himself entirely to his charioteer, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and implores him to give him clear guidance.



CHAPTER TWO

The question is sometimes raised whether an extensive philosophical discourse fits into this situation and it is sometimes argued that the practical crisis calls for nothing but a little practical wisdom immediately bearing on the situation. It may also be added that the crisis itself is a little unnatural. Thinking on these lines it is possible to conjecture, even apart from evidences either negative or positive found in the rest of the epic, that the *Gītā* in its completeness as we have it is a later addition, a philosophical after-thought, a unitary or composite production of a writer or writers other than the writer of the epic, which was worked up into the body of the war-epic somewhat externally in the long centuries of unconscionable interpolation. Without going into the textual considerations bearing on this line of criticism, something very decisive can be said on it from a philosophical point of view. The question of the crisis being natural or otherwise has to be answered entirely with reference to the personality of Arjuna. His psychological build-up as depicted in the first chapter is that of a sensitive, idealistic, conscientious and reflective man. The predilections and inner crises unnatural in the ordinary run of warriors like Suyodhana, are utterly natural in him. The very profundity of the upheaval in his soul renders a commonplace and superficial advice ineffective. Śrī Kṛṣṇa attempts a resolution of his conflict and his psychological rehabilitation with a little practical wisdom. That does not work. The curative power of what is called merely practical wisdom is nullified by the nature of the patient and the depth of the malady. A radical and complete baptism is needed to accomplish spiritual rebirth. Viewed from this angle, a full-fledged philosophical discourse is just the solu-

tion that could be appropriate and adequate to the situation. It is argued by Vedānta Deśika, who discusses this question fully, that, even if the trustful Arjuna does not see the full reach of his enquiry, the teacher, in his unbounded compassion, may well choose to impart to him the complete truth. He gives him *what is needed*, which may well be in excess of *what he explicitly seeks*. Such a procedure is justified by the very completeness of surrender on the part of the disciple. It is illustrated in the famous Bhūma-vidyā discourse of Sanatkumāra to Nārada in the Chāndōgya Upaniṣad. This admission is really unnecessary, for Arjuna's appeal is for decisive enlightenment on what is good for him and he thereby has prayed for all the light involved in the complete definition of 'the good'. That the philosophical dialogue on the battle-field at the moment of action is too extensive is an unimaginative charge, for the conflict here is not a wrestling match but an epic-war involving millions of men led by thousands of heroes, covering a vast field and running to an indefinite duration. Such a voluminous and lengthy struggle governed by traditional codes of martial honour affords plenty of scope for conferences, deliberations and consultations. Heavy talks to boost up the morale of an all-important figure, on whose valour and performance, the very outcome of the engagement hangs, are wholly within the bounds of possibility and realism, even overlooking the extra-ordinary fineness and depth of Arjuna's problem and its possible solution. That any question, however seemingly trivial and commonplace its origin, resolutely pressed and faced with 'openness of mind, thoroughness of work and hatred of superficiality', will inevitably lead to philosophy is the ancient Socratic justification of that discipline. It is no wonder then that Arjuna's question, neither trivial nor commonplace by any standard, elicited from Śrī Kṛṣṇa a full version of Vedānta.

Whether the Mahābhārata war is a historical event is a different question and is not the same as the one calling for the consideration of the appropriateness of the philosophical text in its present context in the epic.

The second chapter has a clear-cut design and consists of three major divisions and one minor interlude. (1) The first major thought presented is that the soul is different from the body and is indestructible. (2) The second division is not meant as serious philosophy but is urged for purposes of persuasion. It tries to show the unreasonableness of Arjuna's present attitude even if the soul is the same as the body and it also brings forward some popular arguments as to why he should fight. (3) The third division introduces the celebrated doctrine of Karma-yoga. (4) The fourth division is devoted to a grand portrayal of the Sthita-prajña, the steadyminded contemplative. We will proceed to analyse and formulate the argument of the chapter strictly in accordance with Rāmānuja's commentary thereon.

I

1. Why is the topic of the super-physical and immortal character of the soul propounded first by the *Gītā*? There are two points of relevance: (1) Arjuna's grief at the imminent prospect of the destruction of the assembled friends and relatives needs immediate rectification. Any attitude or philosophy based on such a wrong view of death and human personality is vitiated at the very source. It should be noted that the doctrine of immortality is not brought in for teaching thoughtless destruction of life. On the contrary, to base the ethical principles of compassion and renunciation on a seriously wrong view of the soul would be to endanger them at the very foundation. Whatever be the final moral philosophy, militaristic or pacific, it should not be supported by a fallacious conception of human personality. Arjuna is not a

consistent materialist either. He speaks of heaven and hell and at the same time mourns in advance the death of the dear ones. Hence clarification of the issue whether there is a deathless spiritual principle embodied in the living being or not is called for. The statement of the correct moral ideal comes up later in the chapter and Arjuna's fundamental question concerns that. Here only the wrong fear of the extinction of his people and the sorrow springing from that are dispelled.

2. According to the fully formed conception of Ideal life, Karma-yoga leads to Jñāna-yoga and Jñāna-yoga leads to Bhakti-yoga. This sequence of spiritual evolution is set forth in the *Gītā* itself. As a necessary antecedent to Karma-yoga a clear conception of the spiritual character of human personality is required. Hence there is a need to determine the philosophical position on the question even before propounding Karma-yoga. The discussion of the soul here meets that requirement.

So both as an immediate remedy to Arjuna's semi-materialistic anguish and as a necessary basis for the programme of spiritual growth to be developed in the course of the work, the doctrine of the soul receives formulation here.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa presents a dilemmatic argument to start with by saying that wisemen do not grieve over either the destruction of the body, for it is an inevitable happening or over the destruction of the soul for it is indestructible. So grief over the liability to death is unreasonable on both the materialistic and spiritualistic views. He says something more to the same effect, on the assumption of materialism as true, at a later stage of the argument. But here he takes up the other alternative, which according to him is the true philosophical standpoint and outlines it in a clear and firm form. The body is inherently perishable and the spiritual entity that animates it is eternal and imperishable. Even as transition

from infancy to youth and from youth to old age, does not cause grief, death being a similar transition from one body to another ought not to be the occasion for grief. It is similar to casting off old garments and taking up new ones. The adventitious and transitory circumstances, favourable and unfavourable, that overtake a person while he is engaged in a righteous course of action are to be borne with equanimity. That is all that is called for and there is no cause whatever for lamenting the phenomenon of death as an absolute disaster. The truth about the soul is a marvellous one; rare and extraordinary is the seer who intuits it aright, rare and extraordinary is one who speaks it out aright, rare and extraordinary is he who having listened to it comprehends it aright.

In this manner the central thesis of the eternal and therefore deathless nature of the spiritual principle in man is asserted. There is a clarification called for. Are there many eternal selves or a single eternal self?

The question is not to be easily answered. The *Gītā* while urging the timeless character of spirit uses pluralistic language: (12) Śankara commenting upon the verse says that the pluralism mentioned is due to the persistent mental habit of looking to the bodies and does not signify a plurality of spirits. Rāmānuja discusses the issue in one of the two polemical sections of his work. His argument is plain and direct. While attempting to remove the materialistic delusion of the disciple, the teacher ought not to use language that adopts pluralism that is supposed to be generated by that materialism itself. If he does, we are not entitled to argue that the conception of a plurality of selves is not part of the very doctrine he is inculcating. While liability to death is being negated of the self, that is precisely the context for negating plurality also of it. At bottom both temporality and plurality are supposed to pertain to the physical aspect of

personality. If the latter negation is not effected in the text, it means either that the teaching is imperfect and misleading or that the plurality of selves is a genuine part of the content of the teaching. He adds the further argument that a process of teaching on the part of an enlightened seer would be impossible if absolute spiritual Monism were to be the truth. Teaching implies consciousness of other selves. How could a perfectly enlightened teacher, to whom the reality of the unity of spirit is a matter of complete and immediate realization, be at the same time conscious of other selves in dire need of his redemptive instruction? Obviously the *Gītā* is the record of a teaching and teaching as such would be incompatible with a spiritual non-dualism supposed to be taught in it. Such is the general drift of the argument.

The text according to Rāmānuja does not merely state the thesis but also offers proofs in support of it. A little more by way of further proof is added in the thirteenth chapter. But the bulk of the argumentation is presented here. Verses 17, 18 and 25 are said to contain the principal grounds for distinguishing between the body and soul and for asserting the imperishable character of the latter.

1. Destruction is something that is to be wrought by pervading the object to be destroyed. The destroying agent must be subtler than the object in order to pervade it. But the principle of consciousness pervades the whole realm of unconscious being and is therefore subtler than it. Therefore the soul being most subtle, because most pervasive, cannot be destroyed by physical agents like weapons, fire, water and air, which are gross in comparison and cannot pervade it.

The argument is based upon two assumptions: (a) Destruction is always through the pervasion by something subtler. (b) The self or subject of consciousness being pervasive of all inanimate nature is the subtler of the two and cannot be destroyed by it. The first point can be understood somewhat

in the light of atomic fission and the second point is to be understood as meaning that all matter can be, in principle, subject to animation by spirit. The argument urges the non-temporality of consciousness on the ground of its non-spaciality. What is without spacial bounds is necessarily without temporal bounds.

While this argument bases itself on psycho-physical considerations, the other arguments are epistemological in character.

2. The self is apprehended as knower, as the subject of knowledge, unlike the body and the rest of the world apprehended as object.

3. As the subject, it is always experienced as one, unlike the body which is experienced as forming a manifold.

4. Being such a unity, it is experienced as non-composite unlike the body that is experienced as a compound of parts.

These three features serve to mark off the self from the body and also to establish the contention of its imperishable character. Of these the first feature is fundamental as it must be the basis for inferring the second and the second naturally leads to the third. It is the third feature that is directly opposed to the possibility of the disintegration of the soul. The self enters the cognitive situation as the 'I' or the knower. It is what puts itself in relation to the world of objects through its cognitive operations. Even when it is itself cognized as in self-consciousness or more deliberate and planned self-knowledge, it is cognized as the knower or subject of knowledge. This knowership is its fundamental and inalienable character and constitutes its self-hood. Now the knower cannot be a manifold, cannot be an aggregate or series of discrete items or events. Awareness of such a manifold as a manifold implies the unitary character of the principle that is aware. If the analysis is pushed to its logical conclusion, the unity of the

knower becomes inescapable. The self may harbour a manifold of acts, dispositions and attributes but what recognizes the manifold as such must transcend the apprehended manifold. A Hume who always stumbles on some particular perception when he enters most intimately into what he calls himself, and on the basis of this experience frames the comprehensive conception of his self as a bundle of perceptions, must be retaining enough self-identity to pass in review the different particular perceptions and make his sweeping discovery about the whole of his self. The hypothesis of the self as a bundle is an old one in the metaphysics of the soul and it has been liquidated in every epoch of serious philosophising. If the view of the self as a manifold is discredited, the idea of it as an aggregate subject to addition and disintegration must be necessarily discarded. Hence the destruction of the self through disintegration is ruled out altogether. There is the possibility that destruction may be conceived in this case not as the disintegration of a composite substance but as a gradual attenuation of powers, which could happen to even a non-composite entity. This is a possibility that Kant seriously puts forward in his *Critique of Pure Reason* in the section which he calls the 'Paralogisms of Pure Reason'. That an entity can lose its powers without either any loss and expenditure of its substance or the annihilating or obscuring action of an alien force is not more intelligible than the dogma of creation out of nothing. That dogma refuses to explain origin in terms of causes and this view refuses to explain destruction in terms of the only factors that could bring about destruction. That the unity of self expressing itself through its cognitive activity is merely epistemological and does not serve to establish the ontological unity of the self is another of Kant's observations on the question. That what is fundamental to knowledge has no corresponding validation in the realm of reality is a principle that falls within the special

philosophical system of Kant and has no force or cogency by itself. The agnostic element in Kant's critique is a considerably vulnerable point.

5. The 25th verse offers another argument according to Rāmānuja:

The modes of knowledge such as perception and inference rooted in perception bring to our cognition objects temporal and perishable. But the self is inaccessible to those modes. It is apprehended through self-consciousness, through a supersensuous non-mediated mode of awareness. That very uniqueness of the vehicle of apprehension renders the object of that apprehension also unique. Hence it would be wrong to construe it as belonging to the genus or category of temporal and perishable material objects. It may be noted that almost the same argument is adduced by Vatsyāyana's Nyāya-bhāṣya for proving that consciousness is not a property of the body. The properties of matter are either perceptible through the senses or inferable on the basis of perceptual data. But consciousness is *immediately apprehended and that not through sense-perception*³. Such epistemic peculiarity, it is urged, is proof of ontological distinctiveness. Descartes distinguished between mind and matter and held that mind cannot be reduced to matter precisely on the ground that the mind's existence is indubitably certain while material existence is uncertain and requires demonstration. When once the immaterial nature of the subject of consciousness is thus established, it follows naturally that the transformations of the body inclusive of the phenomenon of death are not to be ascribed to it.

Thus the *Gītā* on Rāmānuja's interpretation formulates its thesis about the superphysical and immortal nature of self and advances some proofs in support of the thesis.

3. N.S.B. 3-2-53.

II

The second division⁴ of the chapter does not stand on the same level as what went before and what follows. It may be looked upon as a light interlude. If Arjuna were to take it that the self is the same as the body, which in reality is ever perishing and is ever being reconstituted, even then he should not grieve. The dissolution of the organism is the law of nature and not a special calamity. Wisdom lies in reconciling oneself to the unavoidable necessity of nature.

What is born must die some day and death does not mean total extinction of being but only the assumption of a new condition of being. Such a succession of states does not imply either the creation or destruction of the substance, whose states they are, but merely its passage from one specific condition of actuality to another condition of actuality. Such is the true view of causation. The fundamental material is unoriginated and indestructible. It passes through varied conditions of existence. All beings arise out of an antecedent condition of non-manifestation, manifest themselves for some time in the middle and then relapse into non-manifestation. Why should one lament this course of nature?

After thus arguing for a calm acceptance of the law of nature even from the standpoint of Materialism, Śrī Kṛiṣṇa proceeds to appeal to Arjuna on grounds of his caste, reputation and the advantages of fighting from a conventional point of view. For a warrior by birth opportunity to participate in a righteous war is a great and a rare blessing. It is like the gates of heaven being thrown open in welcome by a lucky accident. Arjuna had argued in his sickly rationalization that degradation of caste-morals would be the ultimate result of war. Śrī Kṛiṣṇa shows that his retirement from war would

4. 26-38.

be an immediate over-throw of the caste-morals of a Kṣatriya. Further, for a man of a great reputation for martial prowess, loss of it would be worse than death. Even worthless men would indulge in slighting talk. No one would give credence to Arjuna's expressed grounds for retreat but his conduct would get the all too natural explanation of cowardice. Such an everlasting and universal disgrace would be indeed dreadful. After all there are only two possible consequences in a war, either victory or death on the battle field. Both are welcome prospects for a kingly warrior; if victorious he would get the much-coveted earthly kingship and if killed, according to the ideology of Kṣatriya ethics, he would ascend to Heaven. Arjuna spoke of caste-morals and the social code of the community as being in jeopardy in the wake of a war and the consequent fear of hell, from the commonly accepted conventional moral outlook. Kṛṣṇa effectively counters him in the same frame of reference, for, a kṣatriya undermines the long-standing moral code by his very refusal to take up arms in defence of a right cause and thereby ruins at once his supra-mundane prospects.

III

After this persuasive piece of counselling in a somewhat lower key, Śrī Kṛṣṇa returns to the elevated plane of philosophical discourse.

It should be recalled that Arjuna's appeal was for light and wisdom concerning what is good. The task of determining the moral good, the enunciation of the core and essence of virtue, is taken up now. As a preliminary it is stated that a man must maintain equanimity of spirit as the inevitable mundane dualities of pleasure and pain, profit and loss, and victory and defeat overtake him in the course of his pursuits of the good. The hold on the ideal must be steadfast, and

neither earthly fortune nor earthly misfortune must be allowed to cause deviation through elation or depression as they are natural and are destined to pass away. This insistence on equanimity is a repetition of what has already been said once;⁵ and is going to be repeated many more times.

There are two distinguishable units of understanding. One concerns the ultimate nature of the self and it is called Sāṅkhya. That understanding, says Śrī Kṛṣṇa, has already been imparted to Arjuna. The second unit concerns the nature of ideal action, the life of moral endeavour, and it is called Yoga here. Through this understanding one can achieve emancipation from the bondage of action. Śrī Kṛṣṇa undertakes to impart it now.

With that object in view he makes some preparatory observations of importance.

- (a) There is a radical difference between the Karma-yoga that is the subject-matter of the present teaching and the ritualistic action of the ordinary vedic tradition. When the latter is executed incompletely, it not merely does not bring about its expected results or rewards but entails adverse retribution by way of evil consequences for that very incompleteness of performance. But the method of action constitutive of Karma-yoga has saving power however fragmentary and incomplete its performance and it is free from the double disadvantage of futility and the production of evil. This is a point that will receive elaboration at the end of the sixth chapter.
- (b) The active life taught here is based on a clear and definitive conception of the self, the agent of action, expounded in the preceding section and named Sāṅkhya. It is unified as it is directed to a single comprehensive goal of spiritual freedom. Ordinary actions, the desire-prompted

5. 13, 14, 15.

rituals of popular religion, lack both these features. They are not grounded in a clear awareness of the distinctive nature of the self and are unco-ordinated exertions in pursuit of a conflicting multitude of ends. Self-knowledge imparts unity of direction to the life of virtue. people whose active life is torn asunder, as it were, by this hedonistic, conflicting and complacent version of Vedic religion, hardly rise to the mental plane of enlightened and unified devotion to the Yoga of action.

- (c) This is not a repudiation of the Vedic religion but a plea for the adoption of a sound critical principle in appropriating the moral wisdom of the Vedas. Men are characterized by the three Guṇas and the three Guṇas are distributed in different proportions. Hence there is great variety in aspirations and aptitudes of men. Some are prone to Sāttwic aspirations, some pursue Rājasic ends and some are predominantly Tāmasic in their fields of interest. The Vedas are universal in their benevolence and prescribe methods for realizing the varied ends of the different classes of people. So its prescriptions are not to be indiscriminately obeyed. Not all its rules are meant for all. Each class of aspirants must effect critical selection and must use the Vedic directions that especially suit its psycho-physical station in respect of the Guṇas. Even as a man uses only as much water as he needs and not more in a reservoir abounding in water far beyond his utmost demands, so does a man of discrimination choose from the Vedic commandments only those that pertain to him and are conducive to his specific objectives governed by his specific constitution in terms of the Guṇas.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that his nature is predominantly Sāttwic and hence he should increase Sattwa and reduce the other two Guṇas. He should overcome the habit of respond-

ing to and acting upon the dualities of earthbound existence. He should discard all plans of security and progress not pertaining to the goal of spiritual self-realization. The spiritual quest should be his all-absorbing concern.

These three observations embody a reflective reconsideration and evaluation of the traditional interpretation and observance of the Vedic Religion. While the *Gītā* does not repudiate the heritage, it argues hereby and that fairly strongly in favour of a spiritually efficacious, philosophically informed, co-ordinated, non-hedonistic and critical interpretation and adoption of the Vedic Ethics.

The forty-seventh verse defines the fundamental nature of Karma-yoga, the pathway of liberating action.

Its first affirmation is that a person seeking spiritual freedom must take upon himself the duty to act and only to act. Secondly he should refrain for ever from concerning himself with the 'fruits' of the actions. Rāmānuja's explanation of this two-sided injunction, imposing the exclusive obligation to act and the absolute prohibition of interest in fruits, is that action prompted by desire for fruits binds the agent and action for its own sake, as an end in itself, not prompted by desire for its fruits and dedicated to God in the spirit of worship, emancipates the agent. The third element insisted upon is that while doing the action one must cultivate the feeling and the attitude, that he, the doer, is not the cause of the action and its fruits. This self-effacement in relation to the responsibility for executing the action and producing the effects receives its proper interpretation and justification later on. The fourth point put forward as essential is that one should not fall a prey to the temptation of inaction; he should not entertain or practice love for refraining or withdrawing from action.

The positive element is the utter moral necessity for action and the three others are negative in character, being

detachment from concern for the fruits, renunciation of the egoistic sense of being the cause of the action and its fruits and conquest over possible disinclination to engage in action.

How interested action forges fetters and disinterested and consecrated action unbinds the soul needs elucidation. The desire that one is asked to renounce is a specific type of motive. It is desire not for what is good for the soul as such, but for what is a thing of pleasure for it in so far as it is embodied and in so far as it has identified itself with the body. If the action prompted by desire is well-performed and is of such a character as to be productive of the desired consequence according to the law of Karma, then the desired fulfilment comes about. But this fulfilment in order to be a source of satisfaction and joy requires that the soul's natural power of intelligence must be curtailed and it should not see either its own nature correctly or what is really good for it. In other words the very fruitification of deeds prompted by the type of desires in question, entail as a necessary pre-condition of the success of those deeds failure of vision on the part of the successful agent. Such a loss of intelligence and vision is the very essence of bondage. So renunciation of desires of this description is called for in one who aspires after spiritual self-development. Action done for its own sake, uncontaminated by such binding desires and done in the spirit of worship is said to facilitate release. Such actions serve to suppress the effects of past actions, effects of the nature of Rajas and Tamas, which are impediments to the acquisition and development of spiritual knowledge in the present. Hence they are necessary for the purification in the present. *While renunciation of desire, safeguards the spiritual future, disinterested action effects the cure of present spiritual evils.* Naturally it follows that the lure of non-action must be combated resolutely. How the agent should value his own importance and causal role in relation to the action,

receives ample consideration in the third and eighteenth chapters. With this brief comment on this central verse laying down and defining Karma-yoga, we can go forward.

A man must get established in this Yoga and perform actions renouncing all attachment. He must maintain equanimity in the face of victory and defeat that may accrue to him in the course of his work and this equanimity of mind is what is called Yoga. Work not governed by this basic understanding bringing about the renunciation of fruits and equanimity in relation to incidental results is far inferior to work governed by it. While the former leads to bondage, the latter effects freedom. Hence Arjuna is exhorted to take shelter under understanding. Understanding performance of Karma enables one to undo the binding effects of his former deeds, both desirable and undesirable from the worldly point of view. This transforming exercise of understanding as the basis of Karma and right through the performance of it is an achievement of great skill and competence. Thus renouncing fruits of action, wise men perform actions and thereby achieving freedom from the bondage of rebirth, attain the highest goal.

When pursuit of the path of action illumined by understanding reaches its culminating point of destroying all delusions, then a spontaneous and complete attitude of detachment towards mundane values will come about. Disinterested action removes the blinding effects of the past and thus establishes one in a proper perspective concerning real values. Śrī Kṛṣṇa concludes by adding that when Arjuna's mind reaches this calm steadfastness through the cultivation of the method of disinterested action clearly and distinctly presented herein, he would attain Yoga, the intuitive vision of the self.

IV

The last statement stimulates Arjuna to raise the question: "How is the steady-minded man described? How does he talk, remain and move about?" The question concerns the nature and pattern of behaviour characteristic of the steady-minded person.⁶

The rest of the chapter is devoted to the delineation of the steady-minded man or the ideal of steady-mindedness. Before going into the actual exposition of the text here in the light of Rāmānuja's interpretation, we have to see how this topic comes in here. It has also to be seen how the discussion of the eternal nature of the self, the formulation of Karma-yoga and the picture of the Sthita-prajña constitute a single organically connected theme.

For Rāmānuja the process of spiritual culture, the pathway to ultimate freedom, commences in an intellectual understanding of the real nature of the self. This is the Sāṅkhya mentioned in the chapter. With this understanding as the base Karma-yoga has to be practised. When Karma-yoga develops to its fullness, it initiates Jñāna-yoga or the condition of the steady-minded man. The goal and fulfilment of this condition is the immediate realization or perception of the self in its purity and essential character. This experiential apprehension of the self gives rise to Bhakti, which is the final and proximate means of Mokṣa. This chain of progression through the different stages of spiritual endeavour introduces unity into the chapter and makes the consideration of the Sthita-prajña natural and necessary.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa describes the Sthita-prajña in four stages of descending order according to Rāmānuja and the stages are identified by Vedānta-Deśika with the four stages of yoga

6. *Ibid*: 54-72.

technically defined by the yoga classics and named Vasikāra-Samjña, Ekendriya-Samjña, Vyatirēka-Samjña and Yatamāna-Samjña. The differentiation of stages is effected in terms of the measure of the mind's concentration on the self achieved and that of its renunciation of the lower sensual desires. The fullness of the inward contemplation of the self and the completeness of the eradication of non-spiritual desires are the two fundamental marks of the mature Sthita-prajña.

In the highest stage of this Jñāna-yoga the aspirant finds complete self-satisfaction in the inward mental concentration on the self and sheds wholly and finally all desires. The desires stand uprooted from their inmost depths in the mind and are expelled, as it were, beyond the possibility of revival. In the stage immediately below this, though the outward operativeness of desires is put down, they still persist as subtle hankerings, unconscious pre-dispositions, embedded in the deeper levels of personality. In this stage the aspirant is engaged in eliminating them through repeated application to the meditation on the blissful nature of the self. He fights down anguish and attachment, in relation to the present and prevents the longings, fears and anger in relation to possible future eventualities. The state immediately preceding this is still lower in this respect that the mind, the conscious controlling factor, is itself not ripe and is not free from the contaminating propensities of desires and aversion, even though the outward-going tendencies of the senses have been controlled. While in the stage immediately higher, the unconscious traces and hankerings were the only handicaps, in this the conscious mind itself is not yet a master of itself. It has somehow subdued the senses and withdrawn them from their objects, but lets them go their accustomed way under pressure of external promptings and is unable in itself to keep up steady contemplation of the self. The proper handling of the situation in this stage by the aspirant lies in developing an

attitude of non-cooperation with the mind in its agitations, exultations and hatreds. Whole-hearted identification with the mind's activities must cease and a forceful inner counter-mechanism must be set up, as it were, enfeebling its agitations through indifference, its exultations through disapprobation and its hatreds through non-hatred. The stage lower than this and preceding this in the order of cultivation is marked by a single achievement and all else by way of mental culture and eradication of hidden tendencies is yet to be achieved. Only the propensities of senses to go outwards towards their objects are put down and they are withdrawn as it were into inactivity. The condition of the *Sthita-prajña* consists of all these stages, and beginning with the last it culminates in what was described first. What may be said by way of reply to the possible objection that the text itself does not seem to point to the four stages in the development of the state of steady-mindedness, can only be indicated and *Vedānta-Deśika* has treated the issue fully. There seems to be a clear distinction between the highest stage, marked by the self being established in itself and deriving satisfaction from itself coupled with the completest liquidation of desires and the lowest stage consisting of mere withdrawal of senses from their respective spheres of attraction. If the two are not two levels of attainment, but phases of the same level of achievement, there does not seem to be any necessity at all for mentioning sense-withdrawal, as the purpose of such withdrawal stands wholly fulfilled in the twin achievements of the self's satisfied absorption in itself and the total expulsion of desires. A close scrutiny of the text and the familiar distinction between *Yogic pratyāhāra* and *Samādhi* produce an impression definitely favourable to this interpretation. The two intervening stages can be easily construed and psychologically fit into the scheme of four stages. The immediately succeeding verse (59) definitely envisages the incompleteness and insecurity of the

renunciation that consists of the mere suppression of the senses. It clearly implies that the conquest of desires is a process consisting of stages and that the mere withdrawal of the senses from their objects is just the first and a comparatively external stage leaving much to be accomplished yet.

In these four verses⁷ the essential nature of the Sthitaprajña has been brought out on Rāmānuja's interpretation.

But this condition of steady-minded contemplativeness is not easy of attainment. The senses may be kept under restraint and the outward pursuit of sense-objects may not be there. But inner craving for them, hidden wistfulness, may be still there. This lingering craving of the deeper levels of personality, will disappear only on the intuitive perception of the self, which is of the nature of the highest joy. Hence the sense-control effected without self-realization is really incomplete. But all attempts to realize the self, to obtain a direct apprehension of its blissful nature, are bound to be thwarted by the senses getting control over the mind. In other words self-intuition is impossible without sense-control and sense-control is impossible without self-intuition. How to break through this vicious circle? The solution of the *Gītā* to this problem is characteristic. It advocates devoted contemplation of God as the sovereign remedy. That brings about the greatest purification of the mind and the pure mind can keep the senses under subjection. When the senses are thus subdued the mind can very well realize its goal of self-vision. Disaster awaits those who attempt conquest over the senses by mere self-effort independent of the devout contemplation of God. In the mind not purified by devotion, brooding over the objects of sense-desires is inevitable. Such brooding begets augmented attachment to them. Such attachment reaches in due course utmost intensity in Kama,

7. 55, 56, 57, 58.

passionate yearning for the objects. When such intense yearning is frustrated, as is inevitable in life, it transforms itself into anger against all men in proximity, as if they have caused the frustration. Passionate desire easily becomes passionate pugnacity and hate. Such a paroxysm of anger destroys all sense of discrimination and sense of values. Such a failure of the sense of values produces a complete forgetfulness of the pursuit of which the discipline of senses was the initial step. That forgetfulness undermines the entire plan and resolution to seek the self. Thus the man is lost again to the higher life.

If the mind is offered to God, impurities are removed. Desires and aversions do not pervert and strengthen the senses. When such purified and subdued senses function in relation to the objects, they put them down as it were by neglect and do not become the slaves of objects. The man who follows this path, will have his mind under control and will attain peace and clarity of intellect. Such clarity of intellect puts an end to worldly cares and sorrows born of confusion and in that clear intellect the understanding of the self establishes itself readily. If the mind of a man is not made to dwell on God in the way suggested, and he endeavours after the control of the senses by his own unaided effort, the understanding and the contemplation of the self will never get rooted in him. The desire for sense-objects can never be cured without the contemplation of the self. Without freedom from sense-infatuation, how can a man become happy? If one's mind runs after the senses seeking their respective objects, that mind ruins the understanding of the man by which he could know his self even as a stormy wind drags a boat to destruction. So only his mind is steady who has succeeded in subduing the senses in the manner prescribed, namely, through devout practice of the presence of God.

There is a special point here in Rāmānuja's commentary. That the control of the senses necessary for the condition of steady-mindedness is to be achieved through devotion to God is not that special point. The text is explicit on the matter and all commentators have to and do actually acknowledge it. They may interpret the sense of the devotion in their own ways. But Rāmānuja takes the chain of disasters pictured beginning with the brooding over the sense-objects as really originating from the egoistic effort at spirituality without seeking the gracious aid of God through humble devotion. For him steady-mindedness is itself a fruition of devotion. That is the uncommon construction he puts on the text. If the devotional element introduced is not elaborated in this manner, it would appear that it has been unnaturally brought in and then dropped out altogether in the rest of the chapter. The validity of Rāmānuja's interpretation ultimately depends upon the degree of vital continuity and coherence we are prepared to ascribe to the text.

What a man achieves through the elimination of sensuality is truly remarkable and revolutionary. The nature of the self which is a dark night for the worldly, is fully lighted up for him and he is awake to it. That which is like day-light for the worldly, the realm of sensual objects, is like a dark night for him and he is asleep to it. He, in whom, the coming in of sense-experiences does not produce any change whatever, even as the ocean undergoes no change whatever whether rivers enter into it or not and maintains sameness of level and fullness, is the person that attains peace. He who is instantaneously perturbed by the success and failure in acquiring objects of sense-enjoyment, knows no peace. In sum and substance he who has given up desires and moves about in the world without attachment, without looking upon anything as his, and without identifying himself with the body, attains inner peace and tranquillity. This condition of the

practice of disinterested action based upon the understanding of self and developing into steady-mindedness leads to Brahman. When this is accomplished, there is no more delusion, there is no more bondage. If a person establishes himself in this, even at the last stage of his life, he attains the Ātman of the nature of bliss.

CHAPTER THREE

The second chapter has established certain strong positions and their mutual connections are clearly displayed in Rāmānuja's interpretations. They are the philosophical doctrine of the soul as transcending the physical organism and as deathless, the definition of Karma-yoga in clear terms and the conception of the steady-minded man, the Jñāna-yogi. The intellectual understanding of the self leads to Karma-yoga, which in its turn leads to Jñāna-yoga. This Jñāna-yoga brings about the complete and direct knowledge of the individual spirit. For Rāmānuja the four chapters following are devoted to a fuller exposition of this ideal of self-knowledge along with the entire procedure of Sādhana, the systematic endeavour and discipline towards that goal. Now this statement of the scope of the first six chapters implies a certain restriction also. It means that neither Bhakti nor the nature of God forms the primary subject-matter of these chapters. Though both these come in incidentally in the course of the chapters, they do so only in a secondary and subordinate manner and do not constitute the fundamental theme and do not receive the dominant consideration they merit. They come to their own in the succeeding six chapters. So neither the principal sādhanā, which in the system is Bhakti nor the principal Tattwa, which is God, are directly dealt with in the first group of chapters. Prima facie this strikes as a very drastic restriction of scope and to the extent to which the principal categories of sādhanā and tattwa are made subsidiary, this part of the *Gītā* itself stands reduced to a subsidiary status in the structure of the text as a whole. Two lines of justification are available for assigning this position to the part of the text under consideration. Firstly, in the philo-

sophy of sādhanā developed in the school, self-realization as described in the interpretation of these chapters is a necessary pre-condition, a natural preparation, a wholly required instrumental equipment for developing the principal sādhanā constituted by Bhakti. Thus a prior consideration of it is perfectly legitimate. This is justification in terms of the philosophy of the commentator. Secondly, the text itself bears out the correctness of this interpretation. In view of the great importance attached to Bhakti in the middle group of six chapters and the all-absorbing attention paid to the theme of God, his attributes and glories in them, the scanty and singularly incidental references to them in the first group cannot be explained except in terms of a total design according primary consideration to the preparatory and instrumental themes in the first six chapters of the text and reserving the second set of six chapters for a frontal treatment of the major principles of metaphysics and practical spirituality. The very commencement of the seventh chapter, launching forth wholeheartedly into the theme of God and Bhakti in a wholly unprecedented way makes this plan of the work sharply clear. The chapter twelve gives the order of priorities and the order of ascent and thereby reveals the logical pattern of thought embedded in the work which fundamentally accords with the interpretative restriction observed by Rāmānuja in relation to the first set of chapters. The eighteenth chapter contains a brief summary of the essential landmarks of the way to Brahman taught in the work¹ and that also accords well with Rāmānuja's understanding of the plan of the *Gītā*. It is a remarkable feature of the book that it contains very little of purposeless repetition, though significant words, phrases and even the praise of virtues like equanimity are repeated over and over again. The substantial argument of the work advances

1. XVIII. 50-55

in steady progression conquering its field stage by stage leaving no gaps and committing no redundancy. In that plan, the first major division of the work works out the theme of self-realization through the intellectual understanding of the self, Karma-yoga and Jñana-yoga.

Under this scheme, the main purport of the third chapter is the fuller statement of Karma-yoga. While the second chapter enunciates the basic conception, amplification is certainly called for.

The chapter opens with a question from Arjuna: "If, in your judgment, contemplation is higher than action, why then do you enjoin upon me this monstrous action? It seems to me that by such mixed talk you are confusing me. Give me a single direction, so that I may resolve upon it and following it may attain the ideal." Does this question legitimately arise out of the teaching of the second chapter? If it does not, it would either mean that Arjuna is not the right type of student raising only those questions that are provoked by the matter presented or that the *Gītā* represents a loose body of thought or both. Fortunately such an adverse reflection is unwarranted. Śrī Kṛiṣṇa has preached the gospel of disinterested action with fervent and manysided insistence. But he has indicated the consequence following from disinterested action and that consequence is held to be the steady-minded contemplative life. So while it is true that Arjuna is prescribed the Yoga of action, it is equally true that the contemplative life is exalted above the life of action. He is intrigued and has fair reasons to feel that he is told of the higher and advised to follow the lower. Further, the Yoga of action is life of exertion and exercise of sense-organs while steady-minded contemplation is said to involve the quiescence of sense-activity. How can there be the means-and-end relationship between these two types of life so radically opposed in character?

Śrī Kṛiṣṇa clarifies his stand and says that the two ways of Jñāna-yoga and Karma-yoga are addressed to two sets of aspirants. Those who are advanced in inwardness of life and have achieved mastery over the senses are taught the path of knowledge, while those who are yet to achieve that fitness are taught the path of action. So there is no mixed and ambiguous instruction whatever.

Not every one who may happen to develop the urge for spiritual freedom is at once to take up the life of contemplation. By the mere non-initiation of action or cessation of activity one will not enter into the contemplative life. Contemplativeness issues out of the fullness of Karma-yoga. Apart from it there is no passage into Jñāna-yoga. No one can reach Jñāna which grows out of Karma, without going through that necessary preparation. The attempt to climb to the seventh storey of a seven-storied mansion, says Vedānta Deśika, circumventing the first storey is indeed ridiculous. Further, activity is co-terminous with life and every one is kept in activity in every moment of his life under the compulsive forces of nature. Hence this universal flow of activity must be turned to Karma-yoga instead of attempting the impossible feat of stopping action. It is possible, of course, to keep the senses under check. Of what value is that when the mind continues to dwell on sense-objects? That would be a life of falsehood. He indeed is a superior man who controls the senses through his mind and engages in work with perfect detachment.

In interpretation of the eighth verse Rāmānuja gathers together all the arguments in favour of the superiority of Karma-yoga.

- (a) Association with the body transmitting influences of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas to the soul is bound to tie it down to a life of activity in the world. It is both easy

and safe to attempt spiritual progress from that plane in and through activity itself. The remedy being continuous with the actual order of life is easy, because it involves no violent break with nature and is safe, because not involving a continuous and uncertain struggle against nature contains no risks of lapse.

- (b) Karma-yoga in its full sense includes within itself a constant awareness of the nature of the self and is thus more inclusive than mere Jñāna-yoga for it incorporates in itself a substantial element of Jñāna.
- (c) The very maintenance of the body till the completion of Sādhana requires the adoption of righteous ways of living for that purpose. Hence even the Jñāni must practise considerable Karma-yoga for securing rightful means of subsistence. So the question of a complete cessation of Karma does not arise.

The conclusion emerging from these considerations, according to Rāmānuja, is that Karma-yoga is superior to Jñāna-yoga. Rāmānuja urges that the judgment of its superiority would be meaningless if the persons for whom it is held to be superior were disqualified for Jñāna-yoga. Relative superiority can be judged only with reference to the same type or rank of aspirants. In other words Karma-yoga is better than Jñāna-yoga even for those who are qualified to pursue Jñāna-yoga. The other consideration mentioned previously² that there are some who are not qualified for Jñāna-yoga and for them Karma-yoga is the path, is not withdrawn. It is supplemented by this argument that the higher class of seekers of freedom also should adopt Karma-yoga as a superior way, on grounds of ease, safety, inclusiveness and indispensability.

2. verses 3 and 4.

“But action or Karma involves so many undesirable features like identification with the body and the feeling of attachment to something as belonging to oneself and these continue as pre-disposition in the future also. Thus action has the effect of binding the agent.” Such an observation is to be expected in view of the general conception of the causal efficacy of Karma in Indian thought. Action has a four-fold consequence in general. (1) It creates a tendency in the agent to repeat it. (2) If it is a bad type of action it renders the agent unfit to try out better ways. (3) It produces, on the general theory of Karma, consequences by way of the dualities of pleasure and pain happiness, and misery. (4) It curtails the natural intelligence or power of knowledge on the part of the soul, so that the consequences of action may have the deserved impact. If the agent is in full possession of his metaphysically natural power of knowledge, earthly retributions both positive and negative will remain trivial and ineffective for him. Hence he should be made proportionately stupid in order to rejoice or lament over his material fortunes or adversities. All these effects of action are collectively constitutive of bondage. Now the question is whether the career of action advocated as Karma-yoga does not lead to bondage.

This difficulty is sought to be met from the ninth verse to the sixteenth verse and as a solution of the problem the concept of Yajña or sacrifice is introduced. The concept receives a remarkable interpretation and is made the basic principle of the higher life.

It is emphatically declared, to start with, that all actions, other than those undertaken for the sake of sacrifice, lead to bondage. That means that the binding factor is not action as such but the motive behind it. If the motive is self-centred and the action is performed for obtaining something for oneself, then the action binds the agent. If the motive behind is

simply that of sacrifice, the motive of giving, of oblation, it does not bind. Therefore Arjuna is advised to do actions freed from attachment and for the sake of sacrifice.

The place of sacrifice in life viewed in its cosmic setting is described. The description fixes the meaning of sacrifice by implication.

The creator brought forth men into existence along with sacrifice and pointed it out to them saying “you flourish through this and this fulfils your desires”. That means, man and the sacrifice through which he has to work out his advance were set up in creation together. The gods propitiated through sacrifices grant men the objects of their desire. Gods represent cosmic forces conceived as spiritual and as forming manifestations of the supreme Godhead. Worship of them brings in return to the worshipper resources needed for further worship. Nature’s bounty is a reward for worship and is the equipment furnished in advance for further worship. He who would violate this arrangement and the purpose of these gifts by appropriating them for his own gratification is indeed a thief. The idea is similar to the Idealist conception of rights. Rights are powers secured by society to the individual for purposes of enabling him to contribute his best to the common good of society, those powers being necessary for his doing his best that way, and the citizen who exercises those rights but does not further the goal of the common good is a thief. Here the context is widened and the whole life in the cosmos is taken as the field demanding moral fidelity on the part of man. Sacrifice is the principal end for which the resources are to be utilized. What remains over after that principal object is served is to be utilized by the sacrificer for his own subsistence and even that subsistence must be looked upon not as an end in itself but as something that is necessary for undertaking further sacrifices. This manner of living washes away all sins and those ‘who cook for their own sake’ i.e.,

who utilize the furnished facilities for self-gratification as an end in itself verily 'eat sin'. The manner of their life destines them for a life of moral degradation. On the contrary, life in and for sacrifice creates purity which is a necessary pre-condition for spiritual growth. It is this growth that the creator meant when he said 'you flourish through this'. Man's real greatness comes out in so far as he becomes a sacrificer.

This central role of sacrifice in life is brought out in another equally cosmic picture of the wheel of life.

All creatures owe their life to food. Food is created by rain. So much is common sense. The scriptures point out that rain is the reward for sacrifice. Sacrifice obviously is the resultant of human effort by way of actions. Actions are the doings of the body. The body functions impelled by the soul in it, the soul being in a fit condition to exert the body, owing to the satisfaction of its needs in the embodied condition through food and other physical necessities. Thus the circle consists of food, the nourished embodied soul, the body, its actions, the sacrifice, rain and food. Thus the body of all beings ultimately rests on sacrifice. One who engages in Sādhana either of the nature of Karma or Jñāna, is morally bound to maintain the wheel moving. If he does not maintain himself in and for sacrifice, and disowns the obligation to keep the wheel rotating in its natural way, he becomes a sinner, his life begins in sin and ends in sin and he sees the end of his life as consisting of several pleasures. He indeed lives in vain. The point is that what we live upon is a product of sacrifice and if we do not sacrifice again and reproduce what we live upon, we are terminating the chain of productivity by our ego-centric action. What we derive from sacrifice, we have to return to sacrifice. That is the course of fidelity to the life-maintaining law of existence. The resources of life should be utilized in such a way that the resources are created afresh for further life by our very method of utilizing them.

Consumption should not be the terminus of the productive process, it should itself be originative of further production. Such is the essence of moral life in relation to self-maintenance on the material plane.

There are only four points needing a little clarification before we move forward in the exposition of this chapter.

(a) The sacrifice stressed here must be given the widest possible meaning. It does not merely include the five great sacrifices mentioned in the Smṛitis; much less does it mean merely the oblation to the Gods, one of the five sacrifices. The third chapter gives an idea of the range of meaning that the teacher of the *Gītā* attaches to the word Yajña.

(b) The gods mentioned here as receiving the Sacrificial offerings are merely the various manifestations of the Supreme Divine principle. The eighth chapter makes it clear by its interpretation of the term Adhiyajña, not to mention other numerous indications and statements of this unitary conception of the Deity.

(c) The ordinary idea of sacrifice as a semi-magical technique of bargaining with supernatural and powerful beings stands utterly superseded. Here sacrifice is not a means but the end itself, for life begins with sacrifice and is meant for further sacrifice. The maintenance of the individual is incidental and subordinate to the great end of sacrifice. He draws his subsistence from what remains after the sacrifice is performed and even that is for purposes of being able to perform further sacrifices. Nothing of utilitarian ritualism remains in this new view of sacrifice. In fact the supreme act of life is the sacrifices of the Ego to God, the final surrender of individual personality to the beatitude of divine service.

(d) What does this whole semi-cosmological and semi-super-naturalistic representation of sacrifice mean in simpler and more natural terms to the modern man? What is the

fundamental moral message contained in it? As the conception is a version of the law of Karma in principle, it cannot be wholly embodied in any naturalistic formulation. That is a point on which we should be quite clear. But, admitting that background, we can put its ethical significance in a broad and free manner. It means that the opportunities and resources that life offers to us are not products of chance or accident but conditions brought about by determinate moral deeds by way of antecedent sacrifice or disinterested action. It also means that their proper employment and right utilization lie in dedicating them to subsequent sacrifice or disinterested action. The worthy task in life is not appropriation but effective and active surrender of one's powers and resources to a super-personal cause. This task is left unperformed not merely by the self-seeking Epicurean but also by the contemplative who deserts all action. Both live non-sacrificial lives and hence live in sin.

He who has discovered his-self and found in it alone his whole subsistence, nourishment and enjoyment has nothing to do. The free man, who has at last found his inner being in all completeness and immediacy and draws from it all the joy of life, is free from the obligation to work. He has nothing to gain from work and nothing to lose by non-action. He is established in the self and has achieved final independence of all Sādhana, for the goal of Sādhana has become his natural and assured possession. "Therefore, Arjuna" says Śrī Kṛṣṇa "be unattached and always perform obligatory actions. He who does so attains the supreme goal of life."

To sum up the arguments so far advanced in favour of Karma-yōga: (a) Not all seekers of freedom are universally fit for Jñāna-yōga and some are definitely qualified only for Karma-yōga. (b) For even those who are qualified for Jñāna-yōga, Karma-yōga is better, for some essential Karma of the nature of Yajña is indispensable for them also.

Now a new argument is put forward from the twentieth to the twenty-sixth verse. Its main point concerns the obligation of one who has advanced in spiritual culture and is perfectly in a position to work out his further progress through Jñāna-yōga itself. Supposing he occupies an exalted position in society in respect of reputation for moral and spiritual attainments and it is likely that others will model their lives on the pattern of conduct set by him, what is his duty in the context? The *Gītā* answers that he has to pursue only Karma-yōga. If the alternatives of Jñāna-yōga and Karma-yōga are both possible for him and if he could choose either without jeopardizing his own spiritual prospects, what should be his consideration in making a decision between the two? He should see which of the two are conducive to the uplift of those who are certain to determine the right course on his example and which will harm them on account of their lack of qualification. To them Karma-yōga would be the ideal way and hence he should shape his life in that direction only. He must set an example that is healthy for them. The choice is to be governed by their spiritual necessity. Only that way can he avoid being the cause of their lapse through his example. Otherwise he would be endangering their progress. He loses nothing by following Karma-yōga and great harm will be done to them if he chooses Jñāna-yōga and they follow him in that without having the requisite fitness. This is the primary consideration for the morally reputed one, whose example counts. This is the argument of Loka-samgraha. Śrī Kṛṣṇa brings in the celebrated example of Janaka who followed Karma and attained the highest through it, though he could very well adopt Jñāna-yōga. He offers a more telling and contemporary example also. He points to himself as not having to accomplish anything but still engaged in ceaseless activity, for, otherwise, he would ruin people by setting an example spiritually injurious to them. Somewhat

in the style of Kant's categorical Imperative we may put the principle of Loka Samgraha in these words: "Act only on that maxim whereby you set an example of conduct beneficial to the spiritual interests of those that follow you". Rāmānuja goes to the length of saying that violation of this principle may bring about the degradation of even the properly qualified Jñāna-yōgin. The morally distinguished must live up to the more exacting moral responsibilities of his position and set a standard necessary for the less distinguished. Otherwise he courts moral failure.

It was hinted previously, especially in commenting upon the need on the part of the man of action not to look upon himself as the author of action, that a certain philosophical attitude concerning oneself must permeate the whole course of Karma-yōga and that idea is taken up now for explicit statement. The vexatious question of freedom and determinism enters into the discussion here and a clear understanding of Rāmānuja's position is called for.

(a) Rāmānuja definitely asserts the free responsibility of the Self in relation to its actions as a metaphysical fact.

(b) He maintains that this free moral causality of the individual self is parāyatta, conferred, governed and maintained by God. The freedom is not a negation of Divine omnipotence but a derivative of it. Its exercise is neither an illusion nor a violation of the Divine plan.

(c) In the actual exercise of it in the ordinary course of mundane life, the individual with all his volition is one of the several contributory causes of action and not the sole and self-sufficient cause.

(d) In a predominantly sensual and degenerate life, there is the further complication, that the self keeps in suspension, as it were, its real freedom and acts in subjection to the promptings of the guṇas of prakṛti. In such a life there is the added folly crowning it all that the individual arrogates

to himself entire mastery of the situation. He fancies himself most autonomous when he is most enslaved.

(e) In a philosophically informed life, the spiritually self-conscious individual understands the fact of freedom, understands it as derived and maintained by God, realizes how circumscribed its operation is in the actual course of ordinary life and how it has been surrendered, by the very exercise of freedom, to the domination of the non-self, sees the folly and delusion of arrogant self-assertion in this state of bondage and seeks by an act of deliberate choice to put himself under the exalting and unconditional subordination to God. It is then that he fully becomes what he has it in him to become. By thus humbling himself to the utmost, he achieves complete emancipation.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa places before Arjuna this ideal of total self-effacement in Karma-yōga and says that therein lies complete freedom from anxiety.

Rāmānuja emphasises again and again this requirement as essential to Karma-yōga, that one should take himself to be not the author or agent of the actions in question but to be merely a tool in the hands of the Divine source and master of them.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa sees that the argument for Karma-yōga has taken a fairly completed shape for the present and stops to draw attention to the greatness of the teaching. He maintains that to follow it after understanding it is the best that a man can do. Even to have faith in it inspite of inability to follow it in practice has saving power in due course. Even those who do not repudiate it, though not having firm faith in it, stand to gain eventually. But those who neither follow, nor believe, nor even abstain from repudiating it are totally lost.

Rāmānuja understands that the extreme difficulty and hazardous nature of Jñāna-yōga are dealt with from now on

to the end of the chapter. This is a point that was mentioned in anticipation at the outset.

Deeply rooted dispositions in the direction of worldly life impell a man to behave accordingly, however much he may seek to rise higher. He succumbs to what has almost become his nature.

The senses are subject to the desire for their respective objects. When this desire is thwarted, there arises hatred. These two, desire and hatred overpower the man, however keen he may be for self-control and Jñāna-yōga. Thus turning away from the self, he becomes lost. Therefore one should not allow himself to be dominated by desire and hatred; they are indeed his almost invincible foes and they prevent his cultivation of the tranquil contemplative life. Therefore Karma-yōga, which comes naturally to one in his embodied condition, is most desirable for him, for it is easy and not risky. Karma-yōga is his Swadharma, meaning Dharma that is natural to him. Jñāna-yōga, however attractive it may be, is alien to him, in his present physically conditioned state and is therefore difficult and risky. The Swadharma may not promise quick results and Jñāna-yōga may appear to be otherwise. Still Karma-yōga being safe, easy and unfailingly efficacious is preferable, even if one were to die practising it, to Jñāna-yōga, in view of the latter's difficulty and the uncertainty of one's success in it.

Arjuna is stimulated by this observation to raise a very relevant and important question: How does it happen that one who is engaged in Jñāna-yōga and does not seek sense-pleasures, is compelled, as it were, to deviate from his self-chosen course and turn to physical pleasures? What is that force that engineers his fall?"

Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains the position by analysing the implications of embodiment. Nature is characterized by the three Guṇas of prakṛti, each of which seeks ascendancy over

the other two. When the quality of *Rajas* dominates in the body, the soul inhabiting it develops all-devouving desire. That is its enemy and it drags it towards sense-objects. When the objects cannot be attained, that desire transforms itself into the hatred of the beings supposed to be responsible for the frustration. That hatred is most sinful and leads the soul to violence. This desire, therefore, is to be understood as the force responsible for the fall of the man who originally set out on the path of *Jñāna*. Desire covers up the soul, even as smoke covers up fire, dirt dims the mirror and the membrane of the womb encloses the foetus. The three similes, says Vedānta Deśika, indicate that this eclipse of the soul by desire is natural, recurs again and again even if cleared, and cannot be removed by mere will, without the cooperation of nature. How is the soul enveloped by desire? The natural power of knowledge of the soul is veiled and virtually nullified by this eternal enemy of knowledge. It sets up infatuation for outer sense-pleasures and thus the inward illumination is suppressed. Desire is wild and mad, it aims at the unattainable and is in itself insatiable. Where does this enemy take his stand? Desire functions from the senses, the mind and the determining intellect. By this three-fold attack it covers up the intelligence of the incarnated soul and produces in it manifold delusions. Mainly it blinds it to its own essential nature and make it seek worldly pleasures. “Therefore” says Śrī Kṛṣṇa “in the beginning itself you have to subdue the senses and vanquish completely this enemy who destroys all knowledge and discrimination”. This advice means according to Rāmānuja that desire should be eliminated first through the strategy of *Karma-yōga* and should not be allowed to be there when the vulnerable *Jñāna-yōga* is taken up for practice.

Among the enemies of knowledge we have the senses, the mind, the determining intellect and desire in the ascending order of strength. Hence the most powerful obstacle to

knowledge is desire and it has to be put down and destroyed through the weapon of Karma-yōga.

Rāmānuja's interpretation of the last section of the chapter (33-43) contains original ideas:

(1) He takes the whole section as relating to the difficulties and dangers incidental to Jñāna-yōga. The only justification for that restricted view of its theme is that it particularly focuses attention on what the Text names the greatest enemy of Jñāna.

(2) He argues that the final and effective antidote suggested here for the elimination of Kāma is Karma-yōga. Such an interpretation would be in consonance with the dominant theme of the chapter. Otherwise Śrī Kṛṣṇa would be simply expatiating on the magnitude of the evil of Kāma and would be only advising Arjuna to overcome it without prescribing any specific and effective method for doing so. It would be unsequential sermonizing to tell how bad Kama is and how necessary it is to cure oneself of it, without following up that communication with a definite instruction as to the means and method of treatment.

(3) He defines Swadharma and Paradharma without reference to varṇa and āśrama or one's inherited religion and offers a wholly psychological interpretation of the terms. In the context of moral life being discussed in the chapter on the basis of a general psychological interpretation, he identifies Swadharma with Karma-yōga and Paradharma with Jñāna-yōga.

(4) What the *Gītā* holds to be higher and more powerful than the determining intellect is indicated by a mere pronoun in the text. It is identified with the Ātman or Brahman by other commentators. But Rāmānuja identifies it with Kāma, the great enemy. The only support for the other interpretation is the resultant concordance of the text with Kathōpaniṣad. But Rāmānuja's interpretation renders the text on the other

hand more coherent and meaningful. *Internal coherence* must prevail over *concordance* with another text somewhat similarly worded in the final selection of interpretation.

The third chapter has gone a long way in developing the case for Karma-yōga. Among other things it has emphatically asserted that (a) Jñāna-yōga is possible for some and not for all, (b) it is full of hazards and hardships (c) even those who are qualified for Jñāna-yōga will have to maintain themselves on some basis of Karma-yōga, (d) Karma-yōga in its full sense includes an element of Jñāna and therefore the values realizable through Jñāna-yōga are not missed in it and (e) particularly the distinguished and the reputed are to prefer Karma-yōga.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rāmānuja's exposition of the fourth chapter analyses it as inculcating six fundamental teachings. They are:

- (a) The authoritativeness of Karma-yōga;
- (b) Its being only a form of Jñāna;
- (c) Further elucidation of its distinctive nature;
- (d) Its various types;
- (e) The primacy of the element of Jñāna in the total complex of Karma-yōga.
- (f) The truth concerning Divine Incarnations.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa opens the discourse by saying that the doctrine of Karma-yōga is a very ancient one. He himself, he intimates, instructed Vivaswān in it at the very commencement of the world, and that Vivaswān transmitted it to Manu and Manu, in his turn, imparted it to Ikṣwāku. These are celebrated names of ancient royal sages. This treasure of wisdom was preserved in unbroken tradition in the great ages of the past. But it faded away in later times owing to the very great lapse of time. "Now", Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, "I am giving you again this ancient wisdom, this supreme secret, for you are my friend and devotee". Therefore Arjuna ought not to imagine that what is taught to him now is a new doctrine fabricated just now for persuading him and not something of intrinsic, eternal and universal significance. He ought to see it as a time-less truth, promulgated to the most ancient seers and preserved and transmitted by them as a priceless heritage. As it had been practically lost through the effect of time, it is re-affirmed now and that for purposes of bringing the devoted Arjuna to the correct path of righteousness. Thus its authoritativeness is impressed upon Arjuna.

Arjuna is puzzled by the announcement that Śrī Kṛṣṇa, his friend and contemporary was the teacher of this wisdom to the primeval sages. How is he to understand this? Rāmānuja explains that Arjuna is aware of the fact that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation of the supreme Deity but does not comprehend the nature of incarnation as such. Hence he expresses his difficulty in understanding the information conveyed to him. The full scope of the difficulty is to be made out by the points covered by the answer of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and that answer embodies a complete statement of the theory of avatār.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa conveys the information that he passed through many births in the past, even as Arjuna did and that he knows them all while the latter is ignorant. The plurality of previous incarnations is mentioned as a historical fact, not less real than the transmigration of individual souls, with this point of difference that He, the Supreme One, is aware of them through his uninterrupted omniscience. In assuming birth God does not abrogate His intrinsic nature of being the birthless and deathless over-lord of all existence. His fundamental infinitude of perfections undergoes no diminution in the process of incarnation. The form he assumes, the body in which he incarnates, is a particular configuration of His own radiant and transcendent form untouched by Rajas and Tamas. It is material in so far as it is the medium for the self-expression of the Divine Spirit but not material in so far as it transcends the taints of terrestrial matter. Divine incarnation is not due to the force of Karma, as is the incarnation of individual souls, but is due to the spontaneity of Divine will. Not the necessity of Karma but free resolve transcending the law of Karma is the ground of Divine incarnation. The time at which the descent of the Divine takes place is the time of moral crisis in the world in which righteousness tends to wane and unrighteousness is in ascendancy. The purpose of incarnation is the moral regeneration of the world. This

re-establishment of Dharma is accomplished in two ways. In the first place the righteous ones on earth who are languishing for want of direct communion with God, the object of their loving adoration, are granted the Vision they long for by God in His incarnate form. They are thus rescued from their spiritual affliction and sustained by the life-giving grace of Divine communion. Secondly, those who are evil and are antagonistic to the call of the Divine, are released from their present condition through what is popularly called destruction, so that in a new embodiment they too may respond to it, the old antagonistic disposition being somewhat loosened by the change of embodiment. The former are sustained and nourished in their devotion and the latter are set in fresh circumstances favourable for correcting their ways and turning God-ward. The essence of righteousness is love of God and that is fostered by the self-revelation of God through incarnation.

Such in brief is Rāmānuja's account of the great truth concerning Avatār. The *Gītā* goes on to say that the correct understanding of the nature of Divine incarnation yields spiritual results of immense value.

He who comprehends the truth concerning Divine incarnation is cleansed of all taints that obstruct the development of devotion to God and in the same life in which this comprehension arises, he develops the required loving communion with Him and attains Him thereby. Many have been the seekers of God who, having purified themselves in this manner, have realized the supreme union. The Śruti also records "the wisest ones comprehend His birth". It is not that God incarnates only in a form similar to that of His devotee to redeem him. Whatever be the form in which the devotee seeks to realize Him, in that form He vouchsafes to reveal Himself to him. The transcendent Lord manifests Himself to the vision of those who seek Him only, becomes accessible to their very

mortal means of perception and having thus experienced Him through all the ways desired by themselves, they abide in Him.

The Śruti passage quoted is supposed by Rāmānuja and his tradition to be putting forward the theory of Avatār. The full text reads as follows: “The birthless one takes many births. The wisest ones comprehend His birth”. It could not possibly mean that the birth is merely an illusory appearance, for according to the metaphysical view implied in that interpretation all births are illusory. It could not mean that the spirit is birthless and that only bodies take birth. That is the case with individual souls also and there would be no speciality in the present case requiring appreciation of those who comprehend it. Nor can it simply mean the creative self-differentiation of the unitary Brahman. That point has been asserted several times in sections immediately antecedent to the passage in question and to say it again would be pointless restatement. The *Gītā*, in its very wording in the present context, seems to be expanding the point of view condensed in the passage. Hence the conclusion is urged that the passage contains in a nut-shell the theory of Avatār which the *Gītā* duly elaborates.

After bringing to a close the statement of the theory of Divine incarnation, which was introduced somewhat incidentally owing to Arjuna’s puzzled enquiry, Śrī Kṛṣṇa takes up the fundamental theme of Karma-yōga. He prescribes something in the nature of a penance for all possible obstacles to the starting of Karma-yōga.

It is well-known that men take to the worship of a multitude of petty gods like Indra for securing speedy fulfilment of their worldly desires. Rare indeed are those who engage in the worship of the Supreme God-head shining through all those gods and that not for purposes of satisfying any desire. Desireless worship of the Supreme Reality is an uncommon

occurrence. In these declarations of the *Gītā* a correlation between the values pursued by the devotee and his idea of God is definitely hinted. Śrī Kṛṣṇa introduces a new idea of the Divine creativity of the universe. It is true that the universe is created, sustained and dissolved by God. But still He is not the author of the cosmic process. He is neither bound to it nor does He seek to gain anything thereby. The proposition is certainly paradoxical. Rāmānuja explains it as meaning that the determinate forms and conditions of the creatures in their created state are determined by their own previous deeds and God merely functions as the power bringing about the fructification of the deeds. Neither the charge of cruelty nor that of partiality can be legitimately levelled at the creator. He is the maintainer of the law of moral causation and the specific effects overtaking the creatures are the products of their specific Karma. He is the universal principle of creativity and the determinate actualities of any one life are the inevitable fruitions of the determinate antecedents of that life. Hence it stands to reason that God, though the universal author of the world, is not the author of the special destinies of the creatures in it. There is both activity and passivity in the mysterious nature of God.

Contemplation of this dual nature of Divine creativity, this immanence in the world-process and transcendence of it, says the *Gītā*, enables one to escape the fetters that Karma forges. In other words action does not bind the doer of it, if he bears clearly in his consciousness the nature of God actively engaged but not involved in the world-process. Rāmānuja interprets the statement to mean that this contemplation remove all the possible obstacles that one may encounter in his own nature against taking up Karma-yoga. The hindrances to Karma-yōga are removed by the meditation on the unique nature of God's cosmic activity. It is thus that the ancient travellers on the path of Karma-yōga started

their journey and Arjuna is exhorted to adopt this well-established ancient method.

Even enlightened persons are confused with regard to action and non-action. Therefore, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, that he will explain them and by understanding and following the teaching Arjuna will be able to go beyond all evil. Here non-action is interpreted by Rāmānuja to mean knowledge. There is something subtle to be understood in relation to Karma or action, in relation to Vikarma or manifold actions and also in relation to Akarma or knowledge. The path of action to be followed by the aspirant after liberation is indeed unfathomable. Rāmānuja understands Vikarma as signifying manifold actions that a man engages in, in the course of his life. No further instruction is imparted in the text in this chapter about this. Rāmānuja explains it as due to the fact that the main principle about them has been already laid down in the second chapter. There it was pointed out that actions however diverse in themselves must all be conceived by the Karma-yōgin as directed to the realization of a single all-inclusive ideal of spiritual freedom. The deeds may be many but they are all inspired by a single absolute purpose. This unification of moral life in terms of the ideal sought has been brought out clearly and hence no further explanation of the subtle principle involved in Vikarma is offered here. Such is not the case concerning Karma and Akarma and hence they are taken up for further exposition.

Some comment is necessary at this stage on Rāmānuja's interpretation of the word Akarma as standing for Jñāna. He urges that it should not be taken as signifying negation or absence of action. Often negative terms carry positive connotation like the term Avidya in Īśā Upaniṣad, where it means not absence of knowledge but action. Almost immediately after mentioning the combination of Karma and Akarma,

the text drops the negative term Akarma and substitutes Jñāna in its place.¹

The subtle truths about Karma and Akarma do not pertain to them in mutual separation. They pertain to their essential interpenetration. In fact it is this fusion of the two that was previously introduced as the unfathomable aspect of Karma.

The eighteenth verse gives expression to the fundamental conception. It says "He who sees non-action in action and action in non-action, is the man of intelligence worthily engaged and he is the performer of all actions." He knows the import of all scriptures, deserves liberation and is the person who accomplishes all that the scriptures enjoin. Now the question is: What is it that he has understood, which understanding confers such eminence on him? What is non-action in action and what again is action in non-action? Rāmānuja understands that the point to be seen about Karma and Akarma and the seeing of which is so highly valued is that while a man is engaged in action he must bear within himself a clear understanding of the real nature of the self. If that awareness of the nature of the self is kept up in and through action, the action becomes a form or embodiment of knowledge itself. If that awareness becomes an integral factor in action, then that knowledge is nothing but a form or aspect of action itself. In short this is a process of spiritualizing action and of concretizing knowledge. Knowledge and action can each be looked upon as the substance of which the other is the form. This intimate fusion of the two is what is propounded in the verse under discussion.

How can what is obviously action be considered a form of knowledge? If a man's actions are free from the desire for fruits and if he is free from the delusion that he is the

¹ IV (19, 23).

material frame with which he happens to be associated, then the wise describe that enlightened man as one whose fire of knowledge has destroyed the binding effects of all his past deeds. His action is just an utterance of his knowledge, for it is the latter that is singled out for appreciation.

He who thus renounces interest in the fruits of Karma, is established in the eternal self and does not fancy himself to be dependent on the external physical world, may be engaged in action with zeal; but still he really does nothing. In the guise of Karma he is practising only Jñāna.

Detached from desire, self-controlled and abandoning all concern for things worldly owing to the sole purpose of self-realization, a man may merge himself in bodily action all his life. But still he will not be entangled in transmigration. Through such action itself he directly achieves the vision of the self without the mediation of the stage of Jñāna-yōga. He may be exclusively occupied in Karma but still he will not be bound in consequence provided he is contented with the means of subsistence that life offers him in the natural course, endures without agitation the pleasures and pains that may come to him inevitably in the course of his moral endeavour, does not harbour ill-will and envy towards others explaining to himself his earthly disappointments as due to his own past deeds and retains equanimity of temper in triumphs and defeats. Being fully devoted to the knowledge of the self and therefore unattached to every thing else and hence not seeking acquisition of anything else, if a man performs actions for the sake of sacrifice, as explained before, the entire load of his past Karma perishes.

So far *the idea of Karma as a form of Jñāna* has been explained as due to the essential fact that the right type of action should contain at its core an awareness of the real nature of the individual self, the doer of the action, as transcending the physical organism in which it is embodied. Now

the same idea is brought out in relation to the thought of Brahman, which should permeate all action, for in reality Brahman pervades and sustains the whole situation of action.

The twentyfourth verse is the justly famous enunciation of this principle.

The instruments of sacrifice are Brahman, as they are products of Brahman, the offering, the material offered in oblation, is itself Brahman, the fire into which the oblation is made is Brahman and the performer of the sacrifice is himself Brahman. He who develops and maintains within himself this settled understanding that, as the entire sacrifice has Brahman as its soul, and it is full of Brahman, will attain Brahman itself, will realize his self, which, being sustained by Brahman, is itself of the nature of Brahman. Thus the action performed by the aspirant after freedom being permeated by the thought that all the factors and forces involved in action are embodiments of Brahman, is indeed a form, an expression of that thought itself. It is truly a form of knowledge. It directly leads to self-realization without the mediation of any further stage of Jñāna-yōga.

Thus perfect Karma-yōga is a form of Jñāna in two senses: (a) it carries within itself a clear understanding of the nature of the individual self and (b) is permeated by the thought that Brahman pervades and sustains the entire world of action. Now several types of sacrifice are indicated. Some people simply worship the Gods. Some others take up the regular modes of sacrifice through fire according to the vedic tradition. Still others are engaged in the sacrifice of the form of sense-control and they try to end the fascination of the senses for their respective objects. Others light the fire of mind-control and sacrifice in it all the sense-activities and life-activities. That means that they try to end the mind's fascination for these activities. Some sacrifices centre round material factors. In them the sacrificer gathers material

resources in a proper way and utilizes them for worship of the Gods, for charity, for performing the bigger and smaller sacrifices in the perscribed manner. This kind of sacrifices is called *material sacrifice*, *Dravya-yajña*. Some others engage themselves in rigorous penances. Their sacrifice may be called penance-sacrifice, *Tapōyajña*. Some others engage themselves in pilgrimages. Theirs is *Yōga-yajña*, the sacrifice of getting into centres of sanctity. This interpretation of the term *yōga* is necessitated by the context which is concerned with the classification of types of action. The action of those who pursue the study of the scriptures is called *Swādhyāya-yajña*. Some others are engaged in the cultivation of the import of the scriptures. Their action is called *Jñāna-yajña*. All these put forth active effort with a firm resolve. There are still others, who practise systematic breath-regulation called *praṇayāma* living on regulated food. Their sacrifice may be called *praṇayāma-yajña*. All these are well-versed in the principles of sacrifice and are established in it. Their sins are thereby removed. Living, as they do, on what remains over after the respective sacrifices are performed, they live on the food of immortality. Living thus and absorbed in Karma-yōga, they attain the eternal Brahman. To a man, whose life is devoid of all sacrifice, even the lower ends, namely Dharma, Artha and Kāma, are impossible of attainment. How can he hope for the supreme end of Mokṣa?

Thus many types of sacrifices have been laid down as conducting one to self-realization. All these are to be practised after discharging ones obligatory duties of the nature of Nitya and Naimittika, perpetual and occasional, the performance of which constitutes their essential percondition. To understand these principles and then to live according to them leads one to spiritual emancipation.

It was shown previously that the activity of a perfect Karma-yōgin is itself a form or expression of Jñāna. Now it

is affirmed that in the life of action including the necessary element of Jñāna, the element of Jñāna, the spiritual understanding forming a factor in the attitude of the performer of actions, is the more important and substantial factor in comparison to the element of external physical exertion by way of work. In the action bearing the two aspects of Jñāna and Karma, inner knowledge and outer work, the inner aspect of Jñāna is higher, for all action and everything else that may be resorted to in spiritual endeavour, culminate in knowledge. That knowledge which is aimed at in all Sādhana, is practised in Karma-yōga as an inner element in it. Through continued cultivation it matures into the condition in which it is the ultimate goal. What is included as a factor in Karma, grows and expands gradually into being the fulfilment and consummation of that very Karma.

The knowledge of the self in its essentials has been imparted to Arjuna already in the second chapter. With that as the basis Karma-yōga is to be practised. As the aspirant advances in his programme of self-development through Karma-yōga he should augment this knowledge of the self, concomitantly through further clarification from men of knowledge, by reverencing, questioning and serving them. Those who have attained a direct vision of the self will impart knowledge to persons who reverence and serve them and prove their keenness for knowledge by their questions. When knowledge reaches the condition of direct apprehension, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, one will not get into delusions as Arjuna did. Through that apprehension one sees the fundamental likeness of all selves in their pure and immaterial nature and sees also the likeness of the selves to the supreme Self. One may be the greatest sinner; but if he comes by this boat of knowledge he can cross the ocean of his past sins. Even as a well-lighted fire will reduce to ashes all fuel, even so does knowledge destroy all the effects of past deeds.

There is nothing equal to Jñāna in effecting purification. One treading aright the path of Karma-yōga as described, which contains an essential element of knowledge, will naturally and spontaneously attain the knowledge of the highest type as he reaches ripeness of spirit in Karma-yōga.

Thus acquiring knowledge from instruction, eager for increasing the knowledge thus acquired, wholly bent on it and withdrawing the senses from all else, one speedily attains the aforesaid maturity of understanding. With that he quickly develops the highest peace and joy of spirit. But he who is without knowledge by instruction, or is without eagerness for its increase or whose mind harbours doubts concerning the knowledge acquired through instruction, is indeed lost. The man torn by doubts cannot realize even the lower ends of life, not to speak of the Highest. The pursuit of all spiritual ideals must be based on a decisive conviction about the nature of the self as transcendent of the body. The man who has doubts about this fundamental truth has no chance of any spiritual well-being. The effects of the deeds of the past cannot bind one, whose actions are converted into forms of knowledge in the manner described, whose doubts about the self are all cut asunder through the understanding of the self as taught herein, and whose mind is firmly established in the subject-matter of the instruction. Śrī Kṛṣṇa concludes the chapter with the words “Therefore, Oh Arjuna, cut asunder your doubts concerning the self, doubts that have been engendered by the beginningless primordial ignorance, through the sword of knowledge about the self imparted by me and take to the way of action I am inculcating. For that purpose stand up ready for action”.

To recapitulate the main points contributed by the chapter to the argument:

- (a) The authoritativeness of the doctrine of Karma-yōga.

- (b) The incidental formation of the theory of Avatār and its value in relation to Karma-yōga.
- (c) The character of Karma-yōga as containing in its core an element of Jñāna and as thus constituting a form of Jñāna itself.
- (d) The various types of Karma.
- (e) The greater importance of the Jñāna-element in comparison to the element of action.
- (f) The further increase of Jñāna through the methods indicated.

This summary follows the order of statement in the text and confirms in principle the anticipatory analysis furnished by Rāmānuja at the outset of his interpretation of the chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

The fifth chapter, according to Rāmānuja's interpretation, develops the argument by pointing to the quicker efficacy of Karma-yōga in the matter of leading to self-intuition in contrast to Jñāna-yōga, by further elaborating the element of detachment in action consisting of the conviction that one is not the actual executive force bringing about action and by determining in clear terms the exact nature of the knowledge that emerges out of Karma-yōga. While these are the main contributions of the chapter, in its actual progress the nature of the self in relation to action and the chief features of Karma-yōga are also re-affirmed in appropriate places to round off the theme into a completed whole. The total synopsis of the chapter, therefore, would cover five topics in the following sequence:

- (1) The quicker and easier efficacy of Karma
- (2) The idea that the self is not the doer, the executive force, in action.
- (3) The nature of the self in relation to action
- (4) The nature of the knowledge emerging out of Karma-yōga.
- (5) The essential features of Karma-yōga as leading to that knowledge.

The chapter opens with a question by Arjuna, He says "you praise the contemplative life and again praise the Yōga of works. Between the two, tell me conclusively which is better".

On Rāmānuja's interpretation the question concerns superiority in terms of quickness of fruitification and ease of performance. The question rises out of the discourse as it has progressed so far. In the second chapter Karma-yōga

was enjoined as the first imperative for the spiritual aspirant and one was enjoined to work for the intuitive vision of the self through Jñāna-yōga after acquiring the necessary purity of mind through that first step. In other words Jñāna-yōga was placed on a higher level as something that rises out of the fullness of Karma-yōga. But in the third and fourth chapters it was pointed out that Karma-yōga is to be preferred even by one who is fit for the cultivation of Jñāna-yōga and it was praised as a self-sufficient means for the realization of the self, not requiring the mediation of Jñāna-yōga. Arjuna asks for a decisive statement as to which of these two equally praise-worthy methods, is better as bringing about speedier realization of the goal and as easier of practice.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa answers that the two are independent ways and they can both bring the quest of the spiritual seeker to fulfilment, even if he be quite qualified for the adoption of Jñāna-yōga. But between the two Karma-yōga is superior. That Karma-yogin who being content with the experience of the self involved in Karma-yōga, does not want anything else and therefore hates nothing and therefore bears with equanimity the dualities of life must be construed as being established in perpetual Jñāna. He, as he is established in Karma-yōga that is easy of cultivation, will achieve release from bondage without any difficulty. It is the unenlightened that imagine that the two ways differ in their goals, Karma-yōga leading only to Jñāna-yōga, while Jñāna-yōga is the single means for attaining the vision of the self. In reality both the ways have the vision of the self as their aim and fulfilment. Therefore by adopting either, one attains the goal of the other also. The wise ones see that what is realizable through Jñāna is realizable through Karma also. As the goal is the same, the wise recognize the two ways as equal alternatives. But the point of difference between the two lies in this: Jñāna-yōga is impossible of achievement without Karma-

yōga; and the contemplative Karma-yōgin after achieving Karma-yōga easily attains the goal of self-realization within a short duration. The mere Jñāna-yōgin achieves Jñāna-yōga itself with great difficulty and consequently requires a long duration to reach the goal of self-realization, through it. The man of the path of action, being engaged in good works dedicated to God, acquires purity of mind. As he does not turn away from activity to which he has been all along accustomed like the Jñāna-yōgin but only redirects and sublimates his activity, control of the mind becomes easy for him. Sense-control also becomes easy for him in consequence. He looks upon his self as of the same nature as other selves, for he has discerned the fundamental nature of the self as distinguished from the body and the body is the principle of adventitious and empirical differentiation. Such a Karma-yōgin may perform actions but he is not tainted by any delusive attachment. Therefore he quickly realizes his self in the final intuitive vision.

Thus Karma-yōga is easier to achieve and quicker in yielding the ultimate spiritual result. Hence the requirements of Karma-yōga are to be properly understood.

The primary requirement is that one should understand that his being the agent of mundane actions is not due to his fundamental nature as such, which nature consists of pure consciousness, but is due to his relation to the senses and prāṇa (life-breath) brought about by previous karma. He must keep up this thought that his organs of knowledge, organs of action and the five-fold life-breath function in relation to their respective objects by virtue of their own nature and that he is not the author of those functions. Thus he should ascribe these activities to primordial nature, of which the senses are modifications, should renounce the fruits of actions and continually maintain the thought that he is not the doer of work. With this attitude if one engages

in action, even if he be associated with material nature he does not get into the binding delusion of identification with matter. He is in matter but not affected by it like the lotus-leaf being in water but not getting wetted by it. The yōgins perform actions through the body, mind and determining intellect abandoning desire for fruits for purposes of attaining purity, for destroying the binding effects of past deeds. He who, free from lingering fondness for other objects, and wholly devoted to self-realization, performs actions for the purification of the self renouncing desire for all fruits of actions attains the joy of the steady experience of the self. On the contrary he who, entertaining fondness for other things and disinclined to pursue the self, performs actions for their fruits gets involved in eternal bondage to action. The agent who consigns all activity to prakṛti, material nature, through the discrimination of the essential nature of the self, does neither put forth effort to maintain the body, for that is the work of his association with Karma and not the work of his essential being nor does he cause any action to be performed.

The basic nature of the self is such that the diversified actions of the various kinds of beings with diversified embodiments, the diversified agency of the self in them, the diversified fulfilments of those actions are not the creation of the self in its intrinsic and natural capacity which is beyond the law of Karma. All these, the actions, the forms of agency and the fulfilments are due to the tendencies implanted by the Karma of the past and the resultant delusions. They do not flow from the basic nature of the pure self. The pure spirit in man does neither take away the grief of another held in worldly parlance dear and near to him nor take away the happiness of another imagined to be his enemy. This is so because it is omnipresent and not confined to the physical frame and therefore transcendends the relationship of kinship and enmity posited in relation to the body. All this world

of relationships and actions is the creation of tendencies and pre-dispositions. How can these tendencies and predispositions be there and be operative in the spirit of the aforesaid transcendent nature?

In answer to this objection a very important aspect of the operation of the law of Karma is brought to light by Rāmānuja. The past Karma of the individual actuated by the desires for the lower body-centred values brings about in due course the fulfilment of those desires. That is the primary effect of Karma. But such a fulfilment can have the quality of enjoyment only if the individual's sense of values is such that he values the fulfilment of those desires. In other words the sense of values which prompted those desires must persist as tendencies and predispositions at the time of their fulfilment, for the latter to constitute something pleasant. But the perverted sense of values or the sense of values which attaches the quality of being worthwhile or desirable to these objects of lower interest would stand nullified if the real nature of the self and its paramount spiritual interests were to be fully apprehended by the individual in question. The real nature of the self and its central attribute of knowledge must be veiled or suppressed for the lower desires to be there and for them to continue as predispositions. Thus Karma in order to be fully productive of its results by way of enjoyment, suppresses the self's natural radiance of consciousness, sets up the mechanism of *vāsanās* in consequence that produces a perversion of values and then produces the ephemeral and trivial situations that bring about the insubstantial enjoyment of earthly life. So Rāmānuja says that, the intrinsic nature of the self being veiled or suppressed, the *vāsanās* are fully operative in the self and they are responsible for inducing it again to worldly exertions.

The power of knowledge to annihilate all sins, its glory as the greatest purifier, was mentioned in the previous chapter.

The exact nature and effect of knowledge are set forth now as this is the appropriate context for such a definitive statement.

Those who have received knowledge through spiritual instruction and develop it steadily through continual cultivation, will attain to such a degree of illumination that it destroys, through its power of purification, the entire mass of veiling ignorance accumulated through countless deeds of the past. In them will unfold the highest knowledge, unlimited in expanse which will illumine, like the sun, the whole realm of knowable reality in authentic clarity and fullness.

The statement in the text, signifies for Rāmānuja that the souls are many in their essential nature, for their plurality after the destruction of ignorance is mentioned and that knowledge is an inalienable attribute of the self like luminosity in relation to the sun, subject to contraction and expansion in the matter of effective manifestation. Those who have resolved to realize the self, who contemplate it, who are engaged in the steady pursuit of it and who seek it as the ultimate goal, do thereby destroy the obstructive taints set up by their past and attain the self of transcendent nature from which there is no return to the realm of ignorance and bondage. The Ātman is verily the point of no return. To see the self in its pure nature is to see it consisting of the fundamental characteristic of Jñāna. Such a vision of the self involves the perception of all selves as equal and of the self-same nature, for the basic characteristic of all selves is Jñāna. Inequalities pertain to the adventitious material encrustations. To see the selves as equal is the mark of enlightenment with regard to the original and inherent nature of the self. The selves in their essential nature are pure and of the same nature in all. They who are established in the perception of spiritual equality are as good as liberated even in the stage of Sādhana. They truly abide in Brahman, the pure spirit.

The rest of the chapter, on Rāmānuja's interpretation,

deals with the principles and practice of Karma-yōga which leads to this Jñāna, to the spiritual illumination marked by the perception of equality.

The Karma-yōgin understands the truth about the self from enlightened teachers and pursues that knowledge further by personal effort. He discards the delusion of identity with the body and is firmly and steadily engaged in the pursuit of the blissful experience of the abiding self. Therefore, when things happen to him which would be pleasant or unpleasant to him if he were under the delusive pre-dispositions, he does not give way to elation or agitation. Such is the ideal of the Karma-yōgin, if he is to attain the knowledge under consideration. Thus he, who is detached in relation to worldly pleasures and finds joy in the self, attains the imperishable joy of self-realization. It is not very difficult to renounce external pleasures, for a man of self-knowledge will not find much pleasure in them, as they breed misery as an after-effect and are transient. He deserves self-realization, who overcomes the force of desire and anger even at the stage of Sādhana out of love for it. After release from the body, he will realize all his happiness in the experience and vision of the self.

He who delights in the inner self alone, finds all the resources for increase of delight in the inner self alone, and is possessed of knowledge about the inner self alone, after casting aside all external objects of interest has indeed become the pure self and he will obtain the natural joy of the pure self. They who transcend the mundane dualities of pleasure and pain, who fix their minds on the self, who are devoted to the good of all beings and who are in pursuit of the ideal of self-vision have their impurities obstructing the attainment of the self annihilated and they attain the natural joy of the pure self. In fact Brahman i.e. the pure self, is easy of attainment for them. It is as if the joy of Brahman is already on

hand in respect of those who have conquered their desires and anger, who are resolute in pursuit of the goal and whose minds are controlled and subdued.

The description of Karma-yōga is concluded with an indication of what it leads to, namely, Yōga understood as the intuitive knowledge of the self.

The man of contemplation who withdraws the external senses from their out-going activities, takes a seat fit for the practice of Yōga, sits on it keeping the body straight, keeps the eyes fixed on the spot between the eye-brows, regulates and equalizes in-breathing and out-breathing, with the senses, mind and the determining intellect so controlled that they cannot function in any direction other than the contemplation of the self, hence with desire, fear and anger expelled, and inspired with the sole motive of Mokṣa, is released always. Even in the condition of discipline, he has achieved his goal as he would in the condition of fulfilment.

This Karma-yōga based on the performance of obligatory duties, perpetual and occasional, and issuing in the direct knowledge of the self is naturally pleasing and therefore easy.

It is conceived as worship of the supreme God, who is the real object of all sacrifice and penance, who is the great over-lord of the whole universe and who is related to all beings by bonds of love. Work for the sake of the beloved is itself a happiness and all creatures take to it naturally. Hence if karma-yōga is directed towards God, as it should be, its rigorous aspect as duty is over-ruled and it gets transmuted into joyous service of the Supreme Beloved.

CHAPTER SIX

The fundamental purport of this chapter is the inclusion of the cultivation of yōga, understood as the technique and achievement of an inward intuitive vision of the nature of the individual spirit. The opening verses of the chapter confirm the preceeding elucidation of Karma-yōga as a self-sufficient means of yōga containing as it does an element of knowledge. Then follows the statement of the preliminaries and aspects of Yōga as such. The full nature of the illumination issuing out of the practice of Yōga is brought out and the stages of its development are marked. The difficulties of the path of Yōga come to be pointed out and the methods of avoiding them are laid down. What happens to one who falls away in the middle of his ascent to Yōga is described and that points to the special greatness of the pathway of Yōga.

He is both a man of action and a man of contemplation who, not seeking any fruits of action for himself, performs action in the spirit of worship to the supreme Deity of love as an end in itself. He has the two-fold equipment of Karma-yōga and Jñāna-yōga needed for achieving the Yōga of self-knowledge. But he who discards action and traverses only the path of contemplation, has the advantages of only that path. The right type of Karma-yōgin enjoys the facilities of both Karma and Jñāna. His is a more inclusive and therefore a more self-sufficient way. The fulfilment of the requirement of Karma-yōga that the agent should clearly perceive his distinction from the body renders Karma-yōga in reality a form or expression of Jñāna-yōga itself. Therefore Karma-yōga itself leads to the Yōga of intuitive self-realization without the hazards natural to the pursuit of mere Jñāna-yoga.

For one whō is yet seeking to ascend to Yōga, Karma is the right pathway and for one who is already established in Yōga the cessation of activity may be appropriate. In other words all who seek self-realization in the sense of the attainment of a perfect and immediate understanding of the nature of the self must adopt the way of activity. He is truly established in Yōga who is completely freed from all interests other than the self and has no inclination for any work for realizing them. Therefore he who is yet endeavouring for the realization of the self and is not free completely from other concerns must progress through Karma-yōga. In reality the aspirant must work out his emancipation through the proper regulation of his own mind. The mind alone is a man's friend and foe. The subdued mind is the friend of man and the unsubdued mind is the real enemy.

After this brief resume of the nature of Karma-yōga, the chapter devotes itself to the inculcation of Yōga proper, laying down its fundamentals and also delineating some of its essential practical details. The word Yōga is used in several senses in the text of the *Gītā*. The work as a whole is described by tradition as Yōga-Śāstra, each chapter is named a Yōga, Jñāna, Karma and Bhakti are described as forms of Yōga and Śrī Kṛṣṇa himself is glorified as the Lord of Yōga. According to Rāmānuja's interpretation, the Yōga that is dealt with in this chapter has the specific meaning of 'Ātmāvalōkana', the vision or the direct apprehension of the nature of one's own self as transcending the body and as characterized by knowledge as its basic attribute. For him the whole set of the first six chapters aim at propounding the ways and means of achieving this goal of self-discovery. From that standpoint, this chapter forms the climax of this part of the work.

The state of moral and spiritual development at which the practice of Yōga is to be entered upon has some leading

characteristics. In the first place it is a condition of tranquillity undisturbed by the dualities of pleasure and pain, heat and cold and honour and insult. Both the physical and social fortunes of the individual must be powerless to cause hindrance or disturbance to his onward march towards self-realization. In the second place deriving satisfaction and joy in the knowledge of the intrinsic and distinctive nature of the self, he should be equally indifferent to all the material values, setting at nought the conventional gradation of those values. Thirdly he should view all other human beings be they friends or foes, good or bad as perfectly equal, for his ultimate spiritual goal is such that they can neither hinder nor promote its realization. This three-fold condition of equanimity, indifference and equality provides the right starting point for Yōga.

The aspirant after self-realization, establishing himself thus in Karma-yōga and acquiring the preliminary qualifications for Yōga, must engage himself in the practice of Yōga. He must endeavour every day, in a specific manner and at a specific time set apart for that purpose, to concentrate on the nature of the self bent upon gaining an immediate perception of its nature. He must take to solitude and be alone, control his thought and mind, with no interest in any value other than the pure inward self and with no sense of possession over any thing material whatever. He must resort to a pure and holy spot and seat himself neither too low nor too high on a seat prepared out of something firm like wood on which cloth, deer-skin and the sacred Kuśa grass are spread. Sitting there, with thoughts, senses and all activities under control, he must concentrate his mind with singleness of direction on the self and seek to perceive intuitively the self, for purposes of transcending bondage. His position must be firm and steady and the body, neck and head must be kept straight. He should not lose himself in the surrounding

objects of sight and his vision being withdrawn from them all, must rest by itself on the tip of the nose. He should have his mind in a state of restful joy and be fearless and above all sensual thoughts. He should keep his mind under control and must studiously practise devoted contemplation of God. Even as contemplation of God enables the *sthitaprajña* to conquer the senses, the *yōgin* acquires through the contemplation of God, the purity, steadiness and elevation of mind required for the fruitful pursuit of *Yōga*. God is said to be both an 'Āśraya' for the mind and 'Śubha'. He is both accessible to contemplation and sanctifies and elevates the mind that contemplates. Here the contemplation prescribed is not the principal element in the *Yōga* but an instrumental element that renders the mind capable of engaging in the principal task of intuitive self-knowledge. It comes in as the greatest factor making for mental purification. The contemplation of God as the principal element belongs to *Bhakti-yōga*, for which, the *Yōga* under consideration is just the preparatory equipment.

Some further particulars about *Yōga* are set forth after specifying this process of purification.

A life of moderation, the middle path, is necessary in the matter of food, sleep, movement, play and exertion. Neither undue indulgence nor undue privation is spiritually beneficial. When the mind is thus brought to a state of steady contemplation of the self as the supreme good and is released from the hold of desires, then the man is fit to launch on the process of *Yōga*.

The simile that would bring out the character of *Yōga* is that of a lamp protected from wind and burning with steady illumination. The consciousness of the *yōgin* is freed from the distractions of other desires and functions with steadfast luminosity of knowledge. Through the practice of *Yōga* the mind is withdrawn from all else and dwells with

pleasure on Yōga itself as the supreme happiness. In that condition there is the inward perception of the self by the mind and it derives therefrom all-sufficing satisfaction. This supreme happiness is supersensuous and is obtained through the mind alone hitched to the self. When once established in that blissful experience of the self, as it affords the highest joy, the yōgin does not wander out of it. After attaining this point of realization, when the yōgin returns to normal consciousness, he yearns after it again and values nothing else. When once that great joy of self-discovery has been experienced even if the yōgin is overtaken in the normal plane of his life by great sorrows he is not shaken. This condition of decisive victory over sorrow is what is termed Yōga in essence. Realizing that such is the nature of Yōga, one should resolve upon and start Yōga with zest and joy.

The conditions leading to Yōga in its full sense are restated briefly. One should renounce the desires that take their rise from the mind itself, from its delusive attachments. The desires born of inevitable contact with external stimuli like heat and cold should not be allowed to cause elation and agitation. The entire set of senses must be withdrawn from the sense-objects. Through an exercise of rational discrimination everything other than the self should be adjudged as worthless and gradually relinquished. The mind must be made to rest on the self wholly and no thought for anything else must be entertained. Whenever the mind being naturally unsteady, moves out to other objects, it must be drawn back to the self carefully through the imaginative contemplation of the bliss that will accrue from self-knowledge. To him, whose mind is thus fixed on the self firmly, who is therefore purified of all stains and released from distracting Rajas, and who is thus in possession of his real intrinsic nature, comes the highest joy of self-intuition, for, indeed, the self in its intrinsic nature abounds in the highest joy. He who practises

Yōga in this manner is thereby freed from all taints and obstacles accumulated in the past and attains with ease and for ever the supreme and limitless rapture of the experience of Brahman.

So far the chapter has dealt with the preparatory equipment furnished by Karma-yōga and the further mental and moral self-culture necessary for Yōga. In particular the supreme purificatory factor of devoted contemplation of God is introduced. The further details concerning the mode of life, place of meditation, the seat to be used and the bodily posture are set down in well-considered precepts. There is a happy combination of general principles and minute practical directions. Then the inward essence of Yōga consisting of withdrawal from external distractions, self-knowledge and the great joy of such knowledge is set out in illuminating though brief statements.

In four verses (29, 30, 31, 32) the culminating vision achieved through Yōga is expounded according to Rāmānuja. Each verse relates to a particular stage of achievement and the four stage are described in an ascending order. This is a distinctive feature in Rāmānuja's interpretation of the chapter comparable to his distinctive interpretation of the four stages of the steady-minded Jñāni in the second chapter in a descending order. The point of difference lies in the fact that the latter pertains to Jñāna-yōga and is largely concerned with the negative aspect of eradication of desire, while here the subject-matter is Yōga itself, a fruition of Karma-yōga and Jñāna-yōga, and the description relates to the positive aspect of the progressive insight into the fundamental nature of the self. The common feature of these two descriptive sections is that they belong to the sphere of the philosophy of Sādhana in so far as it consists of the self-realization of the individual self.

The Yōgin perceives inwardly his own self and the other individual selves as transcending matter and as characterised by the same essential attribute of knowledge. He ceases to see in himself and others, the contingent differentiations brought about by embodiment in physical organisms. The essential spiritual nature is discerned by him and that nature is perfectly of the same status and constitution in all selves. Hence he is a man of “equal vision”.¹

Hence he grows into the realization that the pure self is holy like God Himself. The likeness to Divine holiness becomes a matter of direct experience to him. His self-awareness brings to him naturally the awareness of God, for his own self and the Divine Self are linked, as it were, in the common character of holiness. Similarly his perception of other individual selves leads him on to the perception of the Divine Self guided by the same similarity in transcendent holiness.²

When he intuits himself, he does not miss the supreme self and in the Divine Self-knowledge also the cognizance of him who sees God through the common attribute of holiness perceived in himself is incorporated. The seer of God in this manner is seen as such by God. There is established thus a mutual unfailing awareness of one in the other.³

From this level of perception there is advance to a further insight. The two stages described so far belong to the experience of ecstatic self-vision. In the first the perception of equality among all selves is achieved. In the second, the further discovery of likeness to God in respect of holiness is made and guided by that, the seer perceives God in all selves and all selves in God. Now the third stage draws attention to

¹ VI 29

² VI 30

³ VI 31

the condition of one who returns from that summit of ecstasy to the normal plane of consciousness. The quality of the supernormal experience is to be evaluated by the transforming effect it produces in the subsequent normal experience.

Higher the intuition achieved in the moment of exaltation, the deeper and more pervasive must be its transmuting impact on the returning common consciousness of mundane life. The cognition of the self as transcending the body, of all selves as possessing perfect equality in respect of their inward essence of knowledge or consciousness and of their similarity to God from the point of view of holiness are carried over from the experience of Yōga to the ordinary non-mystical experience and the perfected Yōgin sees therein also, whatever may be his condition of life, his own self and other selves as one in holiness with God. He maintains this awareness of God grounded in the Yōgic experience of the common transcendent purity of all spirits and the supreme Being. The yōgic intuition that leads to this consummation of itself in the common experience of life achieves thereby an added height of quality.

From this quality of experience follows the next phase of experience.⁴ The Yōgin being perfectly established in the equality of all selves in their transcendent and pure essence does not enter again into the delusive attachment to his own body and the body-centred associates. Hence he stands above all the pleasures and afflictions that would have affected him if he were still attached to them. This non-attachment and the consequent freedom from mundane dualities of pleasure and pain is the final point in the delineation of the experience of Yōga. It is to be noted that the liberated view of all selves as equal does not lead to the extension of attachment and the consequent widening of the delusive pleasures

and pains but to a cessation of attachment to one's own egoistic and body-centred life. The ordinary man makes an exception of himself; while he is indifferent to the fortunes of others, he is deeply concerned about his own happiness and misery. The yōgin discards this particularism of valuation and develops tranquil indifference to his own mundane success and failure also.

It may be remarked by way of criticism that the ethics propounded here is one of detachment and therefore negative and does not offer a constructive ideal of doing good to others. The reply would consist of the assertion of the fundamental principle enunciated in the *Gītā* that egoistic attachment is the root of all social evil and antagonism and with its removal nothing remains that could act as the basis of wrong-doing. The attachment denounced here is engendered by the error of identifying one's essential personality with the body and that error has to be sublated anyhow whatever the consequence. It is no true and abiding altruism that is based on such an error. It would be on a par with the sensate altruism and pacificism that Arjuna himself entertained in the beginning. The basic activism embodied in Karma-yōga and the motive of Lōka-saṁgraha taught in the *Gītā* are nowhere superseded in the text and the present doctrine adds the necessary negative aspect to the complete picture of the moral ideal. The *Gītā* abounds in the positive and constructive statements of the moral ideal, thereby advocating all the constructive compassion, humanism and fervant endeavour for the universal good that one would wish for. The twelfth chapter dealing with the ideal Bhakta may be cited as one conspicuous illustration. What inhibits the devoted zeal for the common good of all that lives is absorption in the life and interests of the narrow, exclusive and body-centred individualism and with its eradication, there is a spontaneous liberation of all the moral energies towards universal values.

Since this is a recurrent popular criticism, it has been touched upon here. A total view of the ideal of life presented in the *Gītā* is such that criticisms of this kind do not have any validity at all.

After listening to the description of the culminating vision to be achieved through Yōga, Arjuna raises a pertinent question.

“You have spoken to me of this Yōga, dealing with the equality of the selves to be realized by discarding the outer differentiation set up by the bodies. But I do not see how the mind can dwell in that steadily. It is unsteady and fleeting even when directed to objects to which it is accustomed. To fix the mind on this wholly unfamiliar and transcendent theme of the self and its equality is impossible. It would be like trying to control a mighty wind through fragile appliances like a fan”.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa at once admits the difficulty of the task. He suggests two methods for bringing the mind under control and make it accomplish the difficult task on hand. They are ‘Abhyāsa’ and ‘Vairāgya’. Abhyāsa, according to Rāmānuja, stands for the repeated contemplation of the grandeur of the self and its innate perfections. This arouses the mind positively in the direction of the self. Vairāgya stands for renunciation. This has to be cultivated by a repeated examination of the sense-objects and wordly pursuits and the mind must be made to see their worthlessness. In other words, the mind must be gradually educated to seek the knowledge of the self. By drawing it out towards the supremely attractive goal of self-realization and by confronting it with the evils of other pursuits, the mind must be made a willing tool and its voluntary cooperation must be enlisted. Violent direction of it to new themes or unthinking repression of habitual inclinations will not work. Inducement must be placed before it and convincing proof of the danger and futility of other interests

must be presented to it, as it were. This is control through persuasion and enlightenment. In addition to these newly stated techniques, the text, on Rāmānuja's interpretation, reasserts the efficacy of Karma-yōga in subduing and bringing under control the restless and worldly mind and rendering it a fit vehicle for the practice of Yōga. Vedānta Deśika thinks that the principal technique advocated is Karma-yōga and Abhyāsa and Vairāgya are processes prescribed as subsidiary to it. The teaching here would be then in concordance with the concluding thought of the third chapter.

Now Arjuna raises a new question. Supposing a person, though filled with earnest faith, fails in the pursuit of Yōga owing to failure of effort by way of unflinching practice, and his mind lets him down in the high endeavour, what happens to him? Does he not practically perish? He has abandoned the path of the world voluntarily. That way he has no hopes. The higher purpose of Yōga he does not attain as he has fallen away on the way. Is he not doubly ruined? Just as the fragment of a cloud which has torn itself away from a big cloud and does not succeed in joining another big cloud, melts away in the middle, does not a man who has abandoned the world and not succeeded in achieving self-realization, spiritually perish in the middle, succumbing to failure in both ways? Arjuna appeals to Śrī Kṛṣṇa to remove this agonizing perplexity and affirms that only He could do so.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa opens the reply with a startling assurance that the seeker in question is not a loser either in the world or in the realm of the spirit. No one, runs the heartening pronouncement, who does good comes to a low destiny. There is an unfailing conservation of spiritual force and moral effort. If the aspirant fails in his resolve and mental strength in the earlier stages of his practice of Yōga, and that owing to his yielding to the temptations of the world, he is reborn in happy worlds and enjoys to the full pleasures of the same

kind as the ones that caused his fall. When his hankering for them is satiated he is reborn in good and glorious households in which he could recommence his practice of Yōga. Such is the greatness and the unfailing efficacy of Yōga. If he has fallen in the advanced stages of his Yōga, he is reborn, after the interval of enjoyment, in great households of enlightened personages, who are themselves Yōgins and can instruct others in Yōga. These two kinds of rebirth are rare in the world and they are brought about by the beneficent power of Yōga.

In that new life the old Yōgic tendency will assert itself and he is led on to the path of Yōga. He is taken hold of, as it were, by Yōga through the effect of his former practice of Yōga. Even a person who just enquires into Yōga and has not yet started its practice, but gives up the enquiry is not lost. He is conducted in the course of next life to the same enquiry and is launched on processes like Karma-yōga and is eventually brought to the fruition of self-realization. No fall is final and no step taken in the right direction goes without ultimate success. Effort in any measure is carried forward and reinforced a thousandfold and gets crowned with fulfilment. There is, thus, no real failure, in the path of Yōga. Instead of there being a two-fold failure, there is a two-fold gain and fulfilment in the form of mundane happiness and of spiritual perfection.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa puts in a nutshell the greatness of Yōga. It is greater than mere austerity bereft of this Yōga, greater than mere knowledge devoid of the Yōgic understanding of the Ātman, greater than mere Karma not containing the element of self-knowledge through Yōga. The rewards of Yōga are far superior to what can be obtained by mere Tapas, Jñāna and Karma. This praise of Yōga is concluded with an exhortation to Arjuna to become a Yōgin.

The last verse effects a tremendous forward leap from the

Yōga of self-realization. Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that the yōgin devoted to God far surpasses all the other Yōgins. He pursues a unique and all-transcending type of Yōga. Even as the yōgin leaves far behind the adherents of mere Tapas, Jñāna and Karma, the Yōgin that is introduced here goes immensely beyond all other Yōgins and in fact his Yōga constitutes the highest variety. While the Yōga laid down so far is the means for the realization and immediate apprehension of the intrinsic being and nature of the Ātman, the new Yōga introduced here is the pathway to the realization of Brahman or Paramātmā. The comparative evaluation coming as it does at the climax of the glorious delineation of Yōga in the sixth chapter, which is itself the consummation of the Karma-yōga and Jñāna-yōga propounded and explained in all the previous chapters, lends complete justification to Rāmānuja's interpretation of Yōga so far as the way of realizing the innate and pure nature of the Jivātman. While devotion to God was brought in off and on in the course of the first group of chapters in dealing with Karma, Sthitaprajña and also Yōga, it occupied a subordinate and subsidiary position, the principal direction of effort being towards self-realization. The verse also effects the transition to the theme of the second group of six chapters which are wholly occupied with Paramātmā and devotion to Him.

The order of progression, the sequence of the two phases of the argument, is explained by Rāmānuja in terms of the total philosophy of Sādhana, according to which the genuine quest for God presupposes and springs from authentic self-discovery. The principle governing this sequence is repeatedly set forth in Rāmānuja's commentary and particularly in his introductions to the third chapter, the seventh chapter and in his elucidation of the twelfth chapter.

Though the full characterization of this Yōga of the way of Bhakti comes out in all its splendour and fullness in the

course of the coming chapters, its initial mention here contains four essential elements:

In the first place it is directed to the Supreme Being identified with the divine charioteer and teacher, Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

In the second place, it is conveyed by the word *Bhakti* and Rāmānuja takes it as 'Seva' (service) or 'Upāsana' (meditation) on the strength of an ancient etymological text.

Thirdly it involves highest love. The nature of that love is interpreted as incapacity for the very sustenance of life without the object of love. Hence the heart and soul of the devotee are wholly surrendered to it.

Fourthly, it involves śhraddha, which means intense yearning and eagerness for the attainment of God.

Yōga of this description is the Supreme Yōga and with this idea the chapter concludes.

CHAPTER VII

In introducing this chapter Rāmānuja sums up the contribution of the first six chapters and connects their theme as necessary preparation for the teachings of the second group of six chapters.

The preceding chapters elucidate the nature of the finite self; they bring out its transcendence of the material system and its fundamental character as the centre of consciousness. With this basic understanding one should, the chapters inculcate, practise Karma-yōga, disinterested action in the spirit of dedication to God. Such a life puts the individual, as it were, in full possession of his nature and he achieves self-knowledge of the most immediate type. He comprehends himself as of the essence of comprehension and in that discovery lies the achievement of his innate powers. It is a discernment as well as an exercise of the fullness of being.

This self-realization, in the double sense of cognizing and actualizing the self, liberates the self towards the final phase of its spiritual progress. The central principle, the direction and goal, of that phase lies in the knowing of God, which knowing fulfils itself in meditation on God and the meditation matures into love of God. Here Jñāna means Upāsana and Upāsana means Bhakti. This two-fold equation forms the crux of the theory of Sādhana in the philosophy of Rāmānuja. Bhakti of this nature requires as a precondition the self-realization articulated in the first major division of the *Gītā*. The nature of that self-realization is also such that it must issue in Bhakti, the fruition of the entire spiritual endeavour.

The second division of six chapters, according to Rāmānuja, concerns itself with the nature of God and the nature

of Bhakti, the loving contemplation of God. This statement of the theme of these chapters is to be worked out and justified in the detailed interpretation of the text. The seventh chapter introduces the matter to be unfolded.

It is described as dealing with five principal topics:

- (1) The nature of the Supreme Being.
- (2) The concealment and obscuration of the Supreme from the point of view of the finite consciousness by the principle of Māyā.
- (3) The remedy against Māyā as consisting of surrender to the Supreme.
- (4) The several kinds of devotees.
- (5) The valuation of the devotee who is a man of knowledge as the highest type of devotee.

A devotee must have a clear and adequate idea of the object of his devout contemplation. Śrī Kṛṣṇa indicates a leading characteristic of a true devotee. He is one whose mind is so rapt in God, whose soul rests solely on God to such an extent, that deprived of the awareness of the nature and glories of God, he finds himself disintegrating and in the process of annihilation. Such a devotee needs for sustaining himself in devotion a clear and adequate conception of his Deity. Śrī Kṛṣṇa promises to impart this knowledge of God, clearly, distinctively and fully.

That, by knowing which, doubts are dispelled and a certain fullness is attained in knowledge is promised. It is Jñāna, knowledge of God's being in essence and Vijñāna, the knowledge of His transcendence. It is a grasp of the Divine in its essence and distinctiveness. When once this is gained, no gaps remain in knowledge concerning essentials. This knowledge is difficult and rare. One in a thousand works steadily towards spiritual achievement. One among a thousand of such aspirants seeks to know God and endeavours to achieve self-fulfilment through Divine aid. Among a thousand

of such persons devoted to knowing God, only one knows God truly. In other words, spirituality is rare, reliance on God for spiritual advance is rarer and the true apprehension of God in the context is rarest. Hence the substance of what is going to be expounded now is exceedingly difficult and is of the greatest value. It marks the summit of knowledge.

Two fundamental entities constitute the whole of the universe. They are matter and spirit. Neither is unreal and neither is derived from the other. They are called two kinds of Prakṛti, root-principles. Between them spirit called here the Jīva forms the higher Prakṛti and the material principle is the lower. The spiritual principle is higher because it is the commanding factor in the situation and to it the physical reality owes its sustenance. These are propositions stated without much elaboration, for the main purpose of introducing them is not to defend or describe them, but to determine their final metaphysical status. These two original elements of reality belong to God and they constitute His two-fold Prakṛti, His two-fold tools or powers, with which He works in His cosmic manifestation. It is this assertion of *their belonging to God* that constitutes the central affirmation here. All creation proceeds from these basic factors, and those factors, in their turn proceed from Him. At the periodic reabsorption of the worlds creation relapses into them and thus it relapses into God. Thus the entire universe comes from and goes back to God and constitutes His, in an eminent sense.

The cosmos and the basic categories explanatory of it form a realm of being rooted in God and subservient to Him. From the standpoint of causation it is a realm of His effects and from that of value, it is a realm of means to Him. This consideration of their nature is for setting forth His pre-eminence as the supreme cause of all and the supreme end of all. In fact this fact of His pre-eminence in the context

of the world, is itself given as an illustration for the general and comprehensive enunciation of His absolute pre-eminence from the standpoint of attributes such as knowledge and power. There is nothing else that is either superior or even equal to Him in the greatness of attributes. This supreme spirit runs through all the manifold beings of the world whether they be in their causal form or in the developed condition of effects, permeating and sustaining all. It is the sustaining power within all. This controlling omnipresence is best brought out by regarding It as the soul permeating and maintaining all that exists.

The beings so upheld from within truly constitute in their totality Its body. This all-sustaining immanence can be finely conveyed by saying that all that is essential and of central value in all species and individuals in creation are God Himself. In reality it is God that exists with all as the His mode, as His splendour and hence to affirm them in their uniqueness and severality is just to declare Him as shining forth in and through them. They spring from Him, serve Him and form His embodiment. Hence it is He that truly is, with them as points of His self-manifestation, as adjectival determinations forming integral parts of His total expanse of being. Nature's existence means God's existence with nature as a mode of Himself. This intimate union is not inseparability in terms of mutual dependence but in terms of the part deriving being and value from participation in the whole. The whole is the basic reality and parts receive existential status by virtue of inherence in the whole. Inseparability of the qualities does not compromise the primacy of the substance. It is togetherness we have here without obliterating the absolute and intrinsic reality of the substantive principle.

There is something in the nature of a problem here. Rāmānuja states here and again in commenting on verse 5 of

the 9th chapter that God is Self-sufficient and does not depend upon the finite reals for His self-maintenance. At the same time it is a metaphysical fact for the system of thought, that Brahman in its complete actuality includes the realm of finite reals. How are this inseparability and the self-completeness of the Divine Principle to be understood? A clear grasp of the nature of the Infinite Reality and the finite adjectival beings is called for and the exact nature of the organic immanence of the former in the latter must be determined. God's inclusion of all else is not for the purposes of self-completion but for the purpose of imparting reality and value to the finite, while the finite derives reality and value from the organic relation to the Infinite Being. The necessity for the finite, if we may so speak, from the standpoint of God is not for *gaining being or value but for imparting them*. It is a necessity that flows from over-flowing perfection and fullness that demand communication. The necessity for the supreme from the standpoint of the derivative reals is for purpose of drawing from it the very substance of their reality and fulfilment. It is an inseparable relation, indissoluble togetherness, owing to which the finite enters into the realm of reality and value and the infinite releases its abundance to confer existence and worth on the finite. The Absolute Self possesses its centrality and perfection in and through this self-imparting relationship. Its creative immanence is not for the sake of self-completion but on account of it. We have here neither the notion of reciprocal dependence nor that of the utter transcendence of God, for whom the world of finite reals is nothing in the last analysis. While the first alternative nullifies the self-sufficient perfection of God, the second cancels the ontological status and worth of creation.

The self-sufficiency of the Divine Principle and the organic inseparability of the finite can be maintained only by the conception of their mutual relation as one of the perfection

of the Infinite overflowing to sustain and perfect the finite. There is reciprocity of relationship, one-sidedness of dependence and the sponsoring of the imperfect into being by the perfect for purposes of self-communication.

One of the consequences of the creative manifestation of God is the bringing out of Prakṛti in all its aspects, in rendering its potencies of the nature of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas fully active. When Prakṛti comes into the fullness of actualization, its sway on the Puruṣās, the Jīvas still under the bondage to matter, is established in full swing. Prakṛti deludes them into self-forgetfulness and they look upon Prakṛti as all in all. Their consciousness is suppressed into a materialistic mould and the supreme power of which Prakṛti itself is a lower mode is concealed effectively. In matter the bound Jīva perceives the whole of reality and the whole of value. Nature traps the soul in many forms, as the object of enjoyment, as the body, as the senses and the subtle forces operative in less cognizable ways. *The principal consequence of this enslavement is the loss of the vision of God.* This is what turns embodiment into a blindness, into a sleep, nay, into spiritual death itself. Awareness of God is real life and to be deprived of it is death in the most substantial sense. Prakṛti in this capacity is called Māyā. Māyā is not illusion but a tremendous power whose effects are wonderfully variegated and one of its effects may be of the nature of illusion. Nature is not an illusion but by virtue of its immense fecundity it generates all the illusions of mortals. To call Prakṛti itself an illusion is to put the effect in the place of the cause. The phenomenon of illusion must be explained in terms of factors which are not illusory. What the illusion presents may not be explicable but the illusion itself as a psychical occurrence must fall within the field of the explicable. Now Prakṛti understood as a principle of vast resourcefulness of fecundity holds the key, as it were, for explaining the

phenomenon of illusion. The power belongs to God and it forms as previously enunciated the lower part of His cosmic possession. This fact of its belonging to God renders it unconquerable without a special technique adequate for the purpose. It binds the souls with its three-fold potencies of the Guṇās, which seem designed for effecting their bondage.

The only remedy against Māyā, the only way of escape from its chains, is to surrender to God, who is the Infinite both in His power and compassion. Those who are gifted with the insight to see this sovereign cure and take to it worthily, vanquish Māyā and cross over to the life of freedom from the blindness of spirit.

Why does it so happen that this way of release into the blissful practice of devotion is not readily adopted? How do men miss so powerful and natural a remedy? Men weighed down by their accursed Karma of the past, do not rise to the height of soul necessary for the adoption of this sublime act of surrender. There are four types of such men forming a descending series in the order of wretchedness. There are, first of all, those who fail to rise to the understanding of God and hence misconceive all else in existence. Next to them there are those who have a general understanding of the Divine Reality but are not inclined to perfect that understanding. Their case is that of failure of interest. The third-group consists of those whose understanding of God gets lost and effaced by contrary points of view emanating from ill-grounded sophistries. Their flaw is lack of intellectual stamina. This is not a case of failure of understanding but that of the lack of logical power to sustain oneself in the understanding somehow gained. The last and the most degraded type is constituted by men in whom a firmly established understanding of God's nature and His glories generates only hatred towards Him. This may be simply named the failure of heart. These four levels of ungodliness are marked

by failure of understanding, failure of inclination, failure of logic and failure of the heart. It is this four-fold depravity that accounts for men not turning to God and surrendering to Him for freedom.

Corresponding to these there are four types of men blessed by the merit of a good 'past who resort to God by way of surrender and get into the freedom of Bhakti. Here the types are enumerated in the ascending order. The first kind of devotee is one who has sustained a worldly loss and is anxious to recover what he has lost. He applies to God by way devotion for purposes of restoration. The second kind of devotee practises devotion for gaining worldly goods. The two kinds are qualitatively on the same level. While the first has a retrospective concern, the second seeks advance in worldly prospects. The third kind of devotee is on a higher level. He worships God in order to achieve self-realization. He aims at self-knowledge and self-recovery. His endeavour is to raise himself to his true nature to enjoy the life of knowledge, for the self's innate character and function lies in knowledge. To attain the self by way of direct apprehension as the subject of knowledge is the goal for this devotee of God. The *Gīta* describes this devotee as one who desires knowledge and Rāmānuja interprets this desire as the desire for the enjoyment of authentic self-hood, which consists in the unimpeded exercise of the knowing capacity. The last and the highest type of devotee is the man of knowledge. He is not satisfied with self-realization, for he sees the self as forming a means to God, as of value only in serving God, and hence he seeks God as the supreme goal. His endeavour is for God-realization. He adores God for the purpose of attaining Him.

The lover of God, whose love is based on knowledge, has a two-fold distinction. His love is abiding and not transient. If devotion to God is just a means for gaining some

other end, when that end is attained the instrumental devotion ceases. But if God is loved for His own sake and not as a means, this cause for the cessation of devotion is not there and hence it remains perpetual. In the second place, devotion that is instrumental cannot be single-minded and undivided, for the devotee is attached to his end also and he is interested in God for securing it. His heart is divided and his love of God is not integral. But the man of knowledge who seeks God as his sole end and for whom the realization of God is the supreme and all-inclusive purpose loves God with the single-ness of undivided love. Śrī Kṛṣṇa declares that such love is great beyond words and Rāmānuja comments that, as love is infinite, no adequate wording of its range and intensity is possible. Even as the devotee offers his infinite love to God, he becomes an object of equal love to God. All the devotees are noble-minded and generous from Śrī Kṛṣṇa's point of view. Whoever and for whatever reason offers his love to God, creates thereby an opening and an opportunity for God to bestow His grace on him and this bestowal of grace is a necessity of the Divine Nature. *The seeker of God is almost a benefactor* from this standpoint. The receptivity to Divine Grace is construed as a contribution, for such is the need of God. It is this consideration that lies at the back of the application of the epithet 'generous' to the devotee. The bountifulness of God is so great that the creation of opportunities by the finite soul for the exercise of that divine virtue is hailed as itself an act of generosity. While this is the general appreciation of devotees, the devotee who has knowledge and is impelled by that to devotion receives the highest praise. He seeks God as his supreme goal, for without Him, he finds himself incapable of living. Such a devotee is regarded by God as His soul, for in him He too finds His life. That God is the soul of all is a metaphysical truth, while that the true lover of God is the very

soul of God is a truth of love. It is as a result of merit accumulated through countless lives in the past that an individual comes to understand the nature, attributes and glories of God. The content of the knowledge, whose possession elevates the devotee to the highest rank, has been formulated in essentials in the opening verses of the chapter. Such knowledge accrues as an outcome of great holiness of character built up through a series of lives. The man of this knowledge resorts to God as all the means at his disposal and as the object of all his aspirations. He loves God with all the love his nature is capable of. Such a great-souled devotee is indeed rare in this world.

The mass of creatures determined by their inborn dispositions which spring from their past conduct form worldly desires which blind their vision. Naturally therefore, they seek to gratify their desires through the propitiation of lesser gods. The supreme Being Himself augments the faith of those who are devoted to the lesser gods, who are after all His own bodies, as it were, for the whole universe is His body. With such strengthened faith they worship the deities of their choice. Through those gods the Supreme One Himself grants the wishes of their worshippers. But unfortunately the results so attained are trivial and transitory. Those who worship the lesser divine beings, attain them, who are themselves finite and whose glory is transitory. But the worshippers of the Supreme attain the Supreme.

Even when the highest one incarnates Himself for the good of the world, the unenlightened ones do not recognize Him as such and they attribute to Him finitude and mortality. They do not resort to Him in devotion. This is but natural. The assumption of human form and human limitation on the part of God for purposes of winning over men naturally deludes most of the men. God is omniscient and knows all. But there are practically none who really know Him. Such

is the difficulty and rarity of the knowledge concerning God. What happens is that even at their birth creatures are enveloped by the delusive dualities of desire and aversion for the earthly pleasures and pains. Hence they do not have the right sense of values, which consists of seeing joy only in God and seeing pain only in separation from Him. It is this perspective that is characteristic of the man of knowledge. No creature is born with this developed perception of the true good. Those whose good deeds in several past lives have by cumulative effect liquidated the sins that are responsible for the perversion of values and a failure to turn towards God, resort to Him in the ways described before and thus conquer the delusive dualities of earthly pleasures and pains and of the desires and aversions for them. Thus freed through the unfailing efficacy of surrender to God, they devote themselves to His worship, with firmness of resolve for securing emancipation from the cycle of births and deaths, for achieving great prosperity or for attaining Him only.

These three classes of worshippers seeking to attain through Divine Grace self-realization, prosperity and God-realization itself should acquire the knowledge requisite for their pathways in their life-time and at the time of passing out of their bodies they are to meditate on God in a way suited to their aspirations. Those who aim at the recovery of their true self-hood, transcending matter and consisting of pure knowledge should understand the nature of the self, the nature of matter and the cause of bondage. In the same way the men who are after prosperity should understand the mechanism of the world of physical goals and the nature of the soul seeking them. Those who are after God Himself must understand Him. All the three are devotees and along with the knowledge pertaining to what they seek, they should also understand the Divine Power on which their achievement depends. In accordance with their respective goals and

the knowledge they have gained, at the moment of death they are to have the appropriate perception of the Divine. With this brief introduction to the knowledge and the ends of the three classes of devotees the chapter comes to a close. The conclusion arouses the questions which Arjuna puts in the beginning of the next chapter and that chapter embodies the answers in considerable detail. The questions seem to be invited by the very brevity of this conclusion and the use of a set of six technical terms without any preparation or definition. They are Brahman, Adhyātma, Karma, Adhibūta, Adhi Daiva and Adhi yajñā. Thus the equations that follow are actually elicited. Thus is concluded in the first of the chapters dealing with God and Bhakti.

The special features of Rāmānuja's interpretation may be noted.

- (1) That the knowledge of God imparted does not agree with any conception other than the one central to Rāmānuja's philosophy.
- (2) The elucidation of the concept of Māyā.
- (3) The formulation of the way of surrender as the only way for release from Māyā.
- (4) The classification of the ungodly.
- (5) The specific interpretation of the classes of devotees, particularly the Jijñāsu and Jñāni. The specification of the content of Jñāna.
- (6) The elaboration of the characteristics of the highest type of devotion.
- (7) The understanding of the conclusion as referring to the three classes of devotees.

CHAPTER VIII

The whole of the eighth chapter is a continuation and elaboration of the concluding words of the preceding one. It takes up the question of the life of the three classes of devotees, their modes of life, the last stages of their contemplation of God before the close of their life and their different supra-mundane destinies.

Arjuna seeks elucidation of the import of the six technical terms and wishes to be explicitly told of the manner and matter of the final contemplation of the dying Sādhaka.

The explanations follow the order of interrogation. By Brahman in this context is to be understood the imperishable spiritual principle in man. There is frequent usage of the term in this sense in the Upaniṣadic literature. Matter in its subtle forms by which the spirit is tied up in embodiment is called Adhyātma. The two are to be understood for purposes of forming the positive ideal to be pursued and the evil to be discarded respectively. Spirit is to be attained and material entanglement is to be discarded. Karma means here the process of generation by which spirit is enmeshed in matter. Even this is to be understood for purposes of avoidance, for it starts the evil phenomenon of embodiment. These three represent the principal items for the understanding of the devotee who is pursuing self-realization, who discards the semi-materialistic aim of prosperity and who has not yet raised himself to aspiring after God-realization.

The perishable configurations of the physical are called Adhibhūta. The experiencer of the highest pleasures of life open to the bound soul is called Adhidaivata. The point in this characterization is that the aspirant after prosperity surpassing even that of the gods like Indra is planning to

elevate his self as enjoyer above the selves of even the gods.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that by Adhiyajña one has to understand God. Truly the Supreme Being is the central reality in all sacrifice. As has been said before sacrifice is the main principle of a good life and the ultimate object of worship in sacrifice and the guarantee of its fruitfulness is the ultimate God-head.

The six terms have received their due explanations. Śrī Kṛṣṇa addresses himself to answer the question about the worthy way of contemplation at the moment of death. The general principle is propounded that whoever fixes his mind on God at the last moment attains the form and glory that he attributes to God in that contemplation. The contemplation at the point of death has the power of conferring on the individual soul the form and characteristics it associates with the object in that contemplation. The final contemplation has this efficacy even when the object of contemplation is not God. This terminal contemplation is determined by the habitual thoughts of the individual in the whole course of his life. This fact imposes on men the obligation to think of God continually in the whole duration of their lives and to engage in activities that bring up thoughts of God necessarily. One whose whole inward life is thus offered to God is bound to remember Him in the accustomed way at the last moment and is thus sure to attain Him. There is no uncertainty in this matter. The direction of thought in the entire course of life determines the nature of the contemplation at the time of death and the latter determines the nature of the attainment after death. This two-fold causal law knows no violation.

Having laid down the common principles governing the situation under discussion, the text, according to Rāmānuja, proceeds to describe the meditative life of the devotee who resorts to God for prosperity and the resultant nature of his final meditation. He who thinks of God, with concentration in the way to be specified, at the last moment in accordance

with the direction of his thought in the course of his life by way of regular 'Yōga' or meditation and by way of the constant practice of dwelling on God or 'Abhyāsa', will surely attain to a condition of similarity. He is to meditate on God as 'omniscient, primeval, as the sovereign of the universe, subtler than the subtlest, as the creator of all, and of unique form, of a luminous form transcending material ones. Guided by previous thoughts and regular Yōgic meditation, if he meditates, bringing his life-force to the middle of the brows and focuses on this form of God there fully, he will attain a condition of glory similar to that of his object of meditation. The attributes and glories selected for meditation have particular relevance, as it is by virtue of them that the favours sought are to be granted. This devotee dwells on God, not for His own sake, but as a giver of the boon of prosperity. The specific attitude governs the emphasis and selective concentration in the meditation.

The devotee who worships God for purposes of attaining his own pure self-hood, has a different manner and direction prescribed. He dwells on the imperishable, super-physical and transcendent nature of God. It is that of which the knowers of the Vedas speak, which the ascetics go after, and for the sake of which men practise self-denial and austerity. The transcendent nature of God is particularly relevant for one who seeks to attain his own transcendent spiritual nature and for which purpose he renounces sensuality and body-centred propensities. The devotee suppresses his senses, fixes the mind on the imperishable God-head in his own heart, practises steady contemplation, repeats the sacred syllable 'Aum', and recollects continually the Divine reality signified by it. While thus engaged inwardly, if he brings the life-force to the head and passes away, he attains his pure self, freed from all material adjuncts and akin to the Divine

spirit. For him there is no return to the material plane by way of re-embodiment.

So far the devotion and final destiny of the two classes of devotees, those who seek prosperity and self-realization have been dealt with. Now the meditation and the final attainment of the devotee who is established in knowledge are taken up for consideration. He, who meditates on the Lord ceaselessly and in whom the love of God is so intense that without remembrance of Him life itself becomes unbearable, stands on a different footing. He meditates on God with utmost devotion and longs for abiding union with Him. To such a devotee God Himself is the final goal and nothing else such as prosperity etc. The object of his pursuit is easy of attainment to him, for God Himself, not being able to bear alienation from him, chooses him. The obstacles to his meditation are destroyed by God Himself and his meditative life is ripened to fullness and perfection by Divine Grace.

The goal and status attained by these three classes of devotees are to be characterised. The men of knowledge, whose souls are indeed great in devotion, attain God Himself and their attainment is eternal. They do not return to the life of embodiment, which is the abode of sorrow and is transitory. But the devotees who have attained a prosperous life, are subject to eventual loss of status, for every goal other than the union with God, is within the realm of time and is perishable. The Supreme is infinite in every sense and thus transcends the possibility of change.

Incidental to this characterization we have a brief account of the time-scale of the mundane realm in its different levels. Those who are experts on this question know that a day of Brahma consists of a thousand units of time and each unit is made up of the four Yugas of the ordinary mortals. The same is the duration of the night of Brahma. The mundane world arises out of Brahma when his day starts and gets

dissolved when the night sets in. Brahma's year consists of such days and nights. When a thousand Yugas of Brahma, each one of which consists of a hundred years of Brahma is over the entire world of creation inclusive of Brahma, dissolves into the Supreme Being. Thus every being other than the Highest one is subject to dissolution. Whatever prosperity in the higher realms a devotee may gain, his position cannot escape the law of perishability. Only he who reaches God through devotion conquers it, for he has established himself in the Eternal.

What happens to those who have realized their pure spiritual nature? They have also attained a status that is imperishable. It is a high realm of existence under Divine Control. Lower than that we have the realm of souls caught up in matter. Still lower is the realm of mere matter.

But the highest goal is the attainment of the Supreme Spirit, which includes all and permeates all. This attainment is the consummation of the highest kind of devotion. Now the eschatological destiny of the two higher classes of devotees, those who seek self-recovery and those who seek God only, with particular reference to the way they go after leaving the bodies is spoken of. The significance of the land-marks mentioned is shrouded in mystery. They are fire, light, day, the bright-fortnight, and the six-months in which the sun is in the northern part. They are to be taken as representing certain deities and they are supposed to conduct the liberated soul to its final plane of fulfilment. In the same way, smoke, night, the dark-fortnight, and the six months at which the sun is in the southern part, and the light of the moon are the mystical marks of the passage towards realms from which there is a return. These two are the well-established ways, bright and dark, towards the two contrary destinies, one being eternal and the other perishable. One who knows the ways clearly does not make a mistake at the decisive moment

of starting his journey. Therefore one must steadily bear them in mind.

The great merit of studying and understanding these two chapters dealing with the glory of God is said to exceed greatly all the merit one gains by the study of all the Vedas, by the performance of sacrifices and austerities and by giving bountiful charities. The joy of understanding these renders the fruits of the other merit trivial. One who understands the majesty of God and pursues the devotion based on knowledge attains the highest and the primordial station of God.

Now what is the principal contribution of this chapter to the doctrine of God and devotion? It follows up the classification of types of devotion started in the seventh chapter and indicates the lines of development through which each type of devotee progresses till he achieves the fulfilment of his purpose. The hiararchical gradation of devotion is significant and the chapter renders it clear in terms of final value. While no other commentator sees in the eighth chapter such a survey of the programmes of the different types of devotees, the speciality of Rāmānuja's interpretation lies precisely in the discernment of this as the central purport of the chapter. The first class of devotees rely on God for securing wordly or other-wordly advantages and pleasures. That what they attain is neither very great nor permanent is just brought out in the chapter. There is nothing out of the way in treating of this theme. The second class seek knowledge and knowledge is the essence of the soul. As such they are pursuing their own pure spiritual essence. They seek divine aid for gaining their end. For Rāmānuja, this chapter, unfolds their progress and fulfilment also. Theirs is an intermediate purpose, for he who seeks its realization has discarded the material conception of life but has not yet matured enough to see in God-realization the highest perfection of life. Self-realization is incidental to that perfection but at

this stage he is still satisfied with that lower and fragmentary aspect of God-realization. As he advances he is bound to transcend that limited aspiration and form the right idea of the summum bonum. Something must be said about this immature and transitional Sādhaka also and that is well-said in this chapter. But the main theme is certainly the superiority and the matchless beauty of devotion based on knowledge, for which God is both the means and the end, the refuge as well the final goal, and that devotion receives its due portrayal and valuation in the two chapters.

There are two minor elements in the teaching of the chapter which do not lend themselves to modernization of treatment. The account of the relative time-scales operating in the different levels of creation is onesuch. But its purpose is to show up the transitoriness of every achievement falling short of the union with God. That conclusion is significant and intelligible whatever may be the value of the theory of time and the cycles of the world that implies it. The second matter of such a nature is the description of the two eschatological pathways, one characterized by light and the other of the dark nature. The idea of the two ways is very ancient and its interpretation is controversial. Even as early as the Vedānta-sūtras, they are treated without any literalism whatever. They are to be taken as symbolical. There should be no time-factor introduced as restricting the scope of liberation. All this much-needed liberalization of interpretation is to be found in the Sūtras themselves. Nothing of permanent value is lost by that re-interpretation. In fact the teaching about emancipation gains in soundness and rationality by that non-literal interpretation of what is in itself and even at its best a matter of very minor importance. But the significant point in the theory of the ways is that the ways of the saint and the sinner are radically contrasted in death as in life. Reality is such that spiritual values find conservation in it.

CHAPTER IX

The ninth chapter, on Rāmānuja's interpretation, is of pivotal importance. While the two preceding chapters discuss Bhakti in general and deal with all the three levels of it the treatment is not concentrated enough. This chapter devotes itself to an exclusive consideration of the highest level of Bhakti, that which is rooted in knowledge. Its comparative superiority is brought out in the preceding treatment, but its intrinsic character, defining essence, is the theme of the present chapter. The uniqueness of the man of knowledge treading the path of Bhakti is also set forth. Introducing this quintessence of Bhakti, the chapter dwells considerably on the nature and majesty of God in what may be characterised as philosophical lines surcharged with the spirit of fervent adoration.

The teaching of the chapter, therefore, is analysed into three main points and the order of progression indicates the weight of emphasis. They are:

- (1) The supreme grandeur and mystery of the nature of God;
- (2) The uniqueness of the devotee rooted in knowledge;
- (3) The Swaroopa or the essence of Bhakti.

As is the tendency of the text and as is appropriate from the psychological point of view, the greatness of the knowledge to be imparted in the chapter is set down in very meaningful words.

Arjuna is praised as worthy of the instruction by virtue of his disposition of openness to the elevated teaching and freedom from unhealthy scepticism. The knowledge in question is described as the greatest secret and hence the signi-

ficance of remarking on the worthiness of the pupil. It is promised that the Jñāna is going to be taught along with Vijñāna, the latter meaning distinguishing knowledge. If this knowledge is accepted and is acted upon in one's life, it is said, that emancipation from all evils of the nature of hindrances to the union with God will follow as a consequence. The science is a kingly science and a kingly secret. It is a king among sciences and secrets. It is a science and a secret of which only kings of men, in the sense of men possessed of greatness of mind, are the possessors. Greatness of soul is a precondition for receptivity to great truths. The knowledge of the form of devotion which forms the subject-matter of teaching exhibits four remarkable features. In the first place it is such that its object becomes an immediate object of perception when one practises it. To a devotee God reveals Himself in the very process of devotion. Bhakti involves a vision of God in its very essence. In other words Bhakti has the characteristics of the very goal or end of spiritual life, which is the direct experience of God. In the second place, though sharing the character of an end, it is also an effective means to the final end. It is neither a mere end impotent to be a means nor a mere means not rich enough to be an intrinsic value of the nature of an attainment. It is a fulfilment and also a means for further fulfilment. Thirdly it is of the nature of love, joyous from the very inception and hence extremely pleasing to adopt and practise. It does not have the forbidding character of a duty but is lovable and pleasing. Lastly it is imperishable, for the end it brings about is its own development and maturation. It lives on in and as the end it effectuates. Thus Bhakti is perceptual as knowledge, efficacious as a means, supremely joyous and an eternal value. It is a pity that there are people who could adopt this magnificent way of life but still do not do so lacking

faith and earnestness. No wonder they deny themselves the greatest good of attaining God and wander about in the world of death.

The totality of beings sentient and non-sentient constitute the universe open to our ordinary experience. This by itself is not a self-sufficient reality. It is permeated by the Supreme Person, who transcends the realm of that experience. The empirical is interpenetrated by the supra-empirical Reality, which sustains it, controls it and appropriates it as a means to itself. The transcendent is the immanent inner soul of all. Thus all beings subsist in God. But God does not depend upon them for His being which is self-sufficient. Though there is reciprocal relation, the two together constituting a single reality, God constituting the soul and the totality of finite beings constituting His body, ontological dependence characterizes only the finite reals. The subsistence of the finite many in the Infinite one is of a unique nature. It is not to be construed in a physical sense according to which one object derives sustenance from another, through the operation of a law transcending both. The relation of one finite entity to another finite entity is determined by a principle beyond them and yet inclusive of them. It is a case of necessity imposed on the related terms by another law or power transcending them. But the relation under consideration by which the finites derive sustenance from God, is by the free self-determination of God. There is no external necessity binding Him to that relation. It is a spontaneous self-initiated relation. God is self-sufficient and self-determined and hence the world stands in the relation of one-sided dependence to Him and that by virtue of His own creative will.

The problem here is to conceive of God's immanence in the world of finites in a manner consistent with the self-completed reality of God and His absolute freedom. The

uniqueness of this relation is brought out by the text of the *Gītā* in the two verses (4 & 5), wherein it is said that He pervades all in His unmanifested form and that all beings dwell in Him, while He does not dwell in them. It is also added that they do not dwell in Him. God is self-maintaining, while He maintains all by His controlling presence in them. This also is due to His own free choice and no external necessity. The final sentence sums up the paradoxical truth "He is the sustainer of all but does not dwell in them; His own self sustains all beings". There is nothing in the statement that makes the relationship a phenomenal appearance. It just points to the deep mystery of divine immanence. An illustration is offered to make the position intelligible and the illustration is part of the general metaphysical situation being described. Air seems to be move about suspended in empty space without any sustaining force but the fact is not so. There is divine force sustaining it, though the force is not open to observation. So is the situation with regard to all else in the world of finite reality.

It is not merely that the world owes its maintenance to God; it takes its rise from Him and is dissolved into Him, in the periodic creations and destructions it undergoes. Every thing originates from the primordial state of itself embedded in God and goes back to it when it loses its gross existence. God projects the aggregate of manifold beings into manifestation through the power of subtle nature lodged in Him and they are governed by the laws of nature sustained by Him. This cosmic activity which results in endless variety and suffering also for the creatures, does not entail any imperfection on the part of the creator. He works out their destinies determined by their previous deeds and is neither partial nor cruel. He is just the power behind the working out of the law of moral causation. It is thus the processes of nature go on ceaselessly, throwing up and withdrawing

creatures in endless variations of circumstances and affecting them according to their moral desert.

The Supreme One operating omnipotently in and through all existence is not discerned by the unwise. What is stranger still, they do not recognize Him as such even when He incarnates Himself in the mundane world for purposes of working out their uplift. They miss the greatness involved in the compassionate descent of the Divine. Being enveloped by such ignorance and consequently possessed of evil disposition, they realize no aspiration, succeed in no activity and their understanding of things is a failure. Frustration and futility constitute their accursed lot.

But the great ones, possessed of a holy disposition, understand God as the eternal source of all and as having descended out of compassion, and they worship Him with singleness of heart, seeing no possibility of life without loving worship of Him as an end in itself. With a love that makes life unbearable to them otherwise, they sing always the names of God with rapture, engage themselves in acts of worship always and surrender themselves to God with deep devotion always. They worship thus for gaining perpetual communion. Some other great ones add to these forms of devotion, the devotion of the form of knowledge. They contemplate Him as the primordial one, who displays himself in the limitlessly manifold world. The causal unity and the glorious variety of manifestation grip their thought. He is the great sacrifice, He is the routine sacrifice of the religious. He is the worship of the manes. He is the offering. He is the sacred formula with which the rituals are conducted. He is the oblation. He is the sacred fire. He is the act of offering into the sacred fire. He is the father of the universe. He is the Mother. He is the progenitor. He is the grand-father. He is all the sacred object of knowledge. He is the sacred syllable 'Aum' from which the Vedas originate. He is the four Vedas. He is the

goal of all. He is the maintainer of all. He is the ruler. He is the witness. He is the universal abode. He is the refuge, to whom all have to resort for attaining the good and for destroying evil. He is the well-wisher. He is the source of all beings and the final resting place of all. He is what is brought forth and what is dissolved. He is the imperishable fountain-head of all. He radiates heat through the sun and other such sources. He withdraws the rains and releases them. He is the principle of life and the principle of death. He is whatever is present and all that belongs to the past and future. This is the glorious manifoldness of His manifestation.

While such is the theme of the contemplation of the men of knowledge, the ignorant pursuing desires have a different course. They follow the ritualistic portion of the Vedas and worship the lower gods. They sacrifice to them and live on what remains over after the sacrifice. They pray for heavenly life and their conduct sanctifies them just enough for that end. They attain heavenly abodes and enjoy heavenly pleasures. When their merit is exhausted, they re-enter our world of mortality. Such is the cyclical career of the those given to desire and the inferior religion of the Vedas.

“But those great devotees, who contemplate on me with great love and attain me of infinite bliss, do not return to the realm of death again”, Says Śrī Kṛṣṇa. “Towards those great-souled ones, who finding it impossible to live without thinking of me, practise contemplation of me with all my holy attributes and all the glories that belong to me, as the sole object of their lives, I myself undertake the responsibility of bringing them to union with me and of preserving them in that union for ever.”

Those who are devoted to the lower gods and worship them with faith are indeed worshipping the supreme Being Himself, for those gods are but modes of the supreme Being.

These worshippers do not rise to that conception of the ultimate Deity and hence their worship is not in accordance with the proper rule of worship. In reality the Supreme Deity is the object of worship in all sacrifices and He grants the wishes of the worshippers in all of them. But they do not recognize this truth and hence their fall. The principle here is that whoever worships the gods reaches them and whoever worships evil spirits reaches them. In the same way whoever, in the same acts of worship, looks upon the gods nad manes and spirits as the aspects or modes of the Supreme will attain Him. The difference in attainment is this: those whose outlook does not rise to the Highest attain the lesser and perishable gods, for the objects of their worship are themselves lesser and perishable in status, while those who invoke the Supreme as embodied in the proximate objects of worship, by the very same acts of worship achieve union with Him, which is the highest and imperishable good.

There is a great speciality in the worship of the Highest Deity. The simplest offerings, like a leaf, a flower, a fruit or even a little water, if offered with a love, such that life itself becomes unbearable to the devotee without this act of worship and the offering itself is treated as an end in itself, God accepts and enjoys immensely as they are brought to Him with love by the devotee who is sanctified by such love. In other words, the material part of the offering is valued as beyond price provided it is backed by intense love for its own sake. The point of value in the worship is the inward yearning of the heart. The highest Divinity is to be worshipped in the heart and soul and the outer acts and gifts have only a derivative value. Religion is spiritual in proportion to the conception of the Deity.

Even the daily life of man, not ordinarily considered religious, may be consecrated and transmuted into worship. What a man does, what he eats and what he is given may be

consecrated by the thought that God is the ultimate agent. the enjoyer of the fruits and the beings propitiated by them, The lower religious deeds also ordinarily dedicated to the lesser gods may be similarly sublimated. In short, all the activities of life change over to worship if God is looked upon as the doer, the enjoyer, the being propitiated and the deed itself. To put in God at the centre of life with love is to turn it into one continuous adoration. Thus to convert life itself into a perpetual sacrifice unto the Highest, is to get over the binding effects of all the deeds of the past and to reach the Highest.

There is another point of uniqueness in devotion to the Highest. God is the same towards all. There is no one who is hateful to Him and no one who is dear to Him. If one worships Him with love and lives in Him, God in His turn lives in him.

Rāmānuja commenting on the text has the following elaboration of its import; God is equal towards all irrespective of caste, form, nature and knowledge. No one is discarded by Him on grounds of caste, form, nature and knowledge. He does not refuse one on these grounds. Nor does he favour one on these grounds. He only cares for the loving surrender on the part of the devotee. If that all-important condition is fulfilled and the devotee feels himself incapable of living apart from worship of Him, as an end in itself, whatever the other merits or demerits from the worlds' point of view, he is granted life in God on a footing of equality with the object of his worship. God lives in him, as if he is superior to Him. The normal standards of valuation are discarded and a new one in terms of love is substituted.

It may be objected that even preference on the basis of love introduces a distinction and the equality of the Divine nature is rendered questionable. But God's love of creatures is fulfilled, whatever be their direction and object. Only when

they are directed to Him. He chooses them for self-revelation and communion. While He makes no distinction or gradation among devotees, His response to the lives of those who lack devotion to Him, is to further their purposes for what they are worth. The presence of God is withheld from the lives of those to whom that presence is not yet an object of love. Since God is love, He respects loves of creatures, and that non-compulsiveness of divine love is an implication of the nature of real love. Thus the equality of the nature of God's love as well as its utter freedom from the element of force which is the antithesis of real love, are to be correctly understood.

The point of the text here and Rāmānuja's commentary thereon is that nothing other than love and surrender counts in the realm of Divine Grace. When these prime conditions are not there, then also the Divine operativeness manifests itself in perfect equality, in an appropriate manner. Between a man of God and a worldly man, God is equal in so far as His support of the two different kinds of life are concerned. Only towards His devotee His Grace flows in unconstrained bountifulness.

There is a further point of great importance. A man may be given to extremely evil ways from the ethical point of view. If it so happens that he develops love towards God and worships Him regarding that worship as an end in itself, he is to be considered, says Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as a virtuous and pious man. He deserves all reverence. This is so because his resolve is of the right kind. He conceives of God as all in all from the point of view of reality and value. When this great elevation of thought and resolve are reached by him, his lapses of conduct are minor drawback.

But the question immediately arises whether the insistence on morality as a pre-condition of true devotion to God is to be set aside. Śrī Kṛṣṇa answers it at once. The devotee

becomes purified quickly and gets over his evil propensities. The moral flaws which hinder the emergence of complete devotion are obliterated and the man gains peace of spirit in which devotion can flourish to the utmost. The certainty of purification is such that Arjuna himself can safely swear that a devotee of God never perishes. Such is the overruling potency of **Bhakti**.

Even women, and men born in low castes, can attain to the highest if only they take refuge in God. What remains to be said about the prospects of the Brahmins and Kings endowed with devotion? Handicaps of birth brought about by previous karma are of no consequence in the face of **Bhakti**. The moral obligation and the assurance of triumphant progress are all the greater in the case of those free of such initial handicaps.

What follows from all this is that men placed in this perishable life of sorrow must worship the Supreme Being.

The fundamental nature of **Bhakti** is set forth in the last verse of the chapter. Its purport as interpreted by Rāmānuja may be paraphrased in the following words:

“The mind must be made to dwell uninterruptedly on the supreme God abounding in all perfections and transcending all evil, the abode of absolute beauty and goodness, in whom the whole universe of matter and finite souls dwell. That contemplation should have the character of absolute love. That loving contemplation must be of such a nature as to induce service of God. The loving contemplation brings about the experience of God. That experience augments love. The love compels one to engage in service of God. So the loving contemplation should be of such a nature as to issue in the loving service of God. Further, the contemplation should make the devotee surrender himself to God. That means that the devotee not being satisfied with the service he could render to his Lord, surrenders himself to

Him, so that he might be perfectly appropriated by Him and put to use according to His pleasure. It involves total submission and utter readiness to be taken up and utilized by the Lord at His pleasure. The contemplation prescribed should be of such a nature as to lead to this surrender. The principal factor in Bhakti is contemplation and that should be characterized by love, should induce service and should culminate in total surrender. The devotee should find it impossible to live without Him and therefore must cling to Him as the sole basis of his life. When Bhakti acquires the characteristics mentioned and the devotee resorts to God as the sole support of his life, his mind becomes competent to receive the gracious gift of the direct experience of God from God and attains Him."

Bhakti in fullness involves the orientation of the entire soul towards the supreme for it is contemplation full of love inducing the activity of worship and absolute self-surrender. It is a total heightening of being in supreme dedication to the Supreme Reality.

CHAPTER X

In this chapter, according to Rāmānuja's interpretation, there is an exposition of the exalted attributes of God and the boundless realm of finite entities that constitute His glories. This is stated to serve the purpose of originating and increasing Bhakti, whose essence has been already outlined at the conclusion of the previous chapter.

A little digression may be of use here. It may set the theme of the present chapter in its proper background.

- (a) Rāmānuja quotes in the Śrī Bhāṣya a passage from Vākya-kāra and appends its explanation drawn from the Vākya-kāra himself and his interpreter, Dramidāchārya, dealing with a seven-fold discipline leading to the emergence of Bhakti. He treats the passage as authoritative for his own position.
- (b) In the commentary on the *Gītā*, the paths of Karma and Jñāna, are definitely regarded as leading to the path of Bhakti. This is condensed effectively in the brief but very crucial twelveth chapter. This conception of progressive discipline starting from Karma, passing through Jñāna and culminating in Bhakti is fundamental to Rāmānuja's synthesis of the yōgas and his view of spiritual evolution.
- (c) Again in his account of the second pāda of third chapter of the Brahma-sūtra he holds that the recognition of the fact that Brahman is free from defects and abounds in infinite auspicious attributes brings about the emergence of Bhakti.
- (d) The purport of this chapter of the *Gītā* is construed as an exposition of the attributes and glories of God,

the knowledge of which is said to give rise to Bhakti and to develop it.

- (e) In his second interpretation of the verse 66 of the XVIIIth chapter Rāmānuja gives expression to the thesis that one who is overwhelmed by the accumulated sins of the past preventing the emergence in himself of Bhakti need resort to no expiatory discipline. It is enough if he resorts to God in utter self-surrender. That supreme remedy is said to eradicate all the obstacles and to generate Bhakti.

Now how are all these accounts of the factors and disciplines supposed to lead to Bhakti to be reconciled? There seems to be an unco-ordinated variety of attempts to meet the needs of the situation. But in the view of the school the various accounts simply bring out the several aspects of a single solution.

In the first place the aid of surrender is universal and it is a preamble and accompaniment of all yōgas. The vital contribution of it to the initiation of Bhakti is to be recognized fundamentally.

In the second place, the gradual preparation to Bhakti through Karma and Jñāna propounded in the *Gītā* is also to be accepted. The passage from the Vākyakāra is an ancient statement of the same principle. In fact Rāmānuja takes the authority of the Vākyakāra and the interpretations of Dramidāchārya just to vindicate his own stand concerning the necessity of Karma for the development of Jñāna of the form of Bhakti.

What we have in Rāmānuja's interpretation of tenth chapter of the *Gītā* and what he says in introducing and commenting upon the second pāda of the third Adhyāya of the Brahma-sūtras are not two alternative answers to the same requirement. Both are substantially the same affirmation of the value of the understanding of God's attributes and glories in giving rise to and augmenting Bhakti in its final form.

We may sum up the teachings by saying that surrender, the regular progression through Karma and Jñāna and the reflection on the supreme magnificance of the Deity, **are** the three necessities for one who wants to have Bhakti arise in his heart and expand there into boundlessness to answer to the infinitude of its object.

How each of these three factors contributes may be readily discerned. Surrender to the Supreme One is the beginning, the complement, the completion and sometimes the full substitute for every means and discipline towards spiritual perfection. This is a cardinal principle of the system of Rāmānuja. In the seventh chapter it has been introduced as the means of over-coming Māyā and Māyā is an obstacle to Bhakti as it generates counter-inclinations. This is the reason why in the Śaraṇāgati gadya Rāmānuja after putting into words the act of complete surrender, prays for emancipation from Māyā by the grace of God consequent upon it. One of the principal effects of Māyā is infatuation with material objects and ends and indifference to the supreme end of love towards God. By surrender it is supposed that this stands destroyed and thus the way to God-love is cleared of its obstacle.

The Yōga of Karma leads to the Yōga of Jñāna and that in its turn produces self-knowledge. In other words, the two preliminary yōgas have as their fulfilment the realization of the intrinsic nature of the Self by the self. Such self-realization is a necessity for the origin and development of real Bhakti. It is the aspirant who knows in perfect clearness by way of experience his own nature as such that it is incapable of joyous self-fulfilment except by the perception of the Supreme, that can develop the highest devotion towards it. Hence self-knowledge is a fundamental presupposition of the highest kind of Bhakti. In this way the attribution of the power of originating Bhakti to Karma and Jñāna-yōga is perfectly

intelligible. The dictum of the Vakyākāra also fits into this point of view.

Bhakti is upāsana filled with prīti, it is meditation saturated with love. This element of love is to be acquired through an understanding of the nature of the object of meditation. This understanding is about the supreme majesty of God as characterized by infinite exalted attributes and as free from every shadow of imperfection. To Him belong all finite existences as forms of His own splendour. The understanding of God along with His attributes and His unspeakable realms of splendour originates the love that should go into the meditation on Him. It is in this way that Rāmājuna's treatment of tenth chapter of the *Gītā* and second pāda of third adhyāya of the Brahma-sūtras is to be understood. These two sections of the scriptures impart understanding of the attributes and glories of God and thus they serve to give rise to and develop Bhakti.

The three accounts are all intelligible and form together a single theory of the origin of Bhakti. Surrender evokes the inclination towards God, self-knowledge confirms it by the conviction that the constitution of the self is such that the Supreme goal of its life lies in the attainment of God and the understanding of the grandeur of the object of meditation furnishes the intellectual basis for the love that should fill the meditation.

Why the knowing of God's supreme greatness should produce love towards Him can be explained by reference to the nature of the soul as lying in knowledge and the Upaniṣadic axiom that in the knowledge of the infinite is the fulfilment and supreme bliss of the soul so constituted. Brahman is of the nature of Ānanda for precisely this reason. Hence the knowledge of the infinite greatness, glory and beauty of God is the foundation of the love that should animate the meditation on Him.

The chapter opens with what appears as a climax of the previous chapter and states the essence of the present one. Then Arjuna raises a question seeking elucidation of a topic essential for the meditative life. The rest of the chapter is an answer in considerable elaboration. Since these three divisions of the chapter are, each of them, of some length and concern very significant principles, the chapter itself may be studied under three sections.

I

Śrī Kṛṣṇa makes the following declaration: “Listen further to my supreme instruction. I will speak out for your good as you are pleased with the teaching and do love me. Even the gods and the great sages do not comprehend my greatness, for I am the source of the gods and the great sages in every respect. Whoever knows me as transcending matter, the finite souls that are bound in matter and also those that are liberated, and as the supreme lord of the universe, and does not confound my transcendent being with any other entity is freed from all sins”. Rāmānuja interprets this as signifying that the knowledge of the unique and transcendent nature of God by virtue of His purity and perfection puts an end to all sins that obstruct the origination of Bhakti.

“The mental qualities of beings such as intelligence, knowledge, discrimination, forgiveness, truthfulness, the control of the senses, the control of the mind, pleasure, pain, the states of mind leading to pleasure and pain, fear, fearlessness, non-injury, equality, gratification, austerity, charity, the mental qualities at the back of fame, those that lead to disrepute and all such conditions are due to my will to that effect”.

The knowledge of the substantive nature of God as distinguished from every other entity originates Bhakti. The knowledge of the auspicious attributes and the glories that belong to Him increase the Bhakti so originated. It is in the process of describing the glories of God that the qualities of mind mentioned above are said to be due to the will of God.

“The seven great sages and the four Manus, who are the mental offspring of Brahma and who are the primeval progenitors and protectors of all creatures live according to my will. He who understands these attributes and glories of mine will be indubitably established in the path of Bhakti. You will yourself see that his devotion increases progressively. With that developed Bhakti he will realize that I am the origin of this vast universe of matter and souls and that all beings function on account of me. Realizing this natural and boundless dominion of mine and my blessed qualities like condescension towards creatures beauty and compassion, the men of knowledge practise devotion towards me with intense yearning of heart.”

Thus the fact of the knowledge of God's qualities and glories expanding devotion is clearly affirmed in these verses of the *Gītā*, thereby confirming Rāmānuja's interpretation of the chapter.

“Their minds are fixed on me, their life is centred in me, they instruct each other about me and narrate the marvellous deeds of mine. The speakers are gratified and the listeners are delighted. To such who seek abiding union with me and worship me, I grant with love the pathway of intelligence, through which they will come to me. Further, out of compassion, I being established as the object of their inward contemplation, will destroy the darkness of soul of the nature of desire for other things through the shining light of knowledge concerning me. By my self-revelation whatever linger-

ing attachments they may have for lower values I obliterate completely.”

What happens may be put in a few words. The knowledge of the distinctive nature of God starts the love of God. The knowledge of his qualities and glories brings about the expansion of love. When the devotee contemplates on God with such increased love, God who dwells in his heart as the object of devotion brings about the maturation of that contemplation. Then He grants him a revelation of Himself and the overwhelming bliss of that perception destroys finally the craving for other values. It is such craving set up by past Karma that involves the individual in ignorance, for the pursuit and attainment of lower values requires the sustaining aid of the ignorance of the highest. When the craving is liquidated without any residue and with all its effects the soul in man apprehends the Divine unimpeded and by the spontaneous light of its knowledge. Thus spiritual life is a continuous education in the love of God, alternately progressing by human effort and Divine Grace and culminating in the final vision of God. It is the nature of the finite soul to be in communion with God. That nature stands suppressed by the perversities of ignorance-breeding desires. Love of God carried to its finality of magnitude and intensity eradicates the perversity and the soul is set up in its proper nature of beholding in ecstasy the infinite reality of God.

II

There is great appropriateness in Arjuna making some remarks at this stage giving expression to his understanding and appreciation of the sublime teaching imparted to him thus far. There should also be a clue as to how he has been moved by the great doctrine of God and Bhakti. Hence we have here his observations with an appeal for some essential

aids towards the practice of Bhakti. “Thou art the absolute Brahman and the absolute light and the holiest one spoken out by the Vedas. The great sages declare thee to be the eternal and divine puruṣa, the unborn and primordial deity. All the sages such as Asita, Devala and Vyāsa and the divine sage Nārada sing of thy supremacy in this strain. Thou thyself also doest teach me so. I take all that thou teachest me as true. Neither the gods nor the demons, oh Lord! know the manner of thy manifestation. Only thou knowest thyself, oh! thou the greatest of puruṣas, the creator and the Lord of all beings, the God of gods and the over-lord of the universe. Thou mayst tell me all your glories, the glorious modes by which thou pervadest all the worlds as their controller. How am I to think of thee, when engaged in the loving contemplation of thee? What are the forms of being in which I have to contemplate thee as the inner controller? Enlighten me more and that extensively, about your great attributes and the modes of thy control of the cosmos. Listening to the nectar of thy words, I know no satiation.”

III

Śrī Kṛṣṇa responds to the question through the rest of the chapter.

“I will tell thee my holy manifestations selecting the most important of them, for there is no limit to them and hence an exhaustive statement is out of the question”.

Here the word ‘Vibhūti’ roughly translated as glory so far may be explained. The word ‘Vibhū’ means the Lord or Controller. The word ‘Vibhūti’ signifies the Lordship or control when used in an abstract sense. But when it is used in the sense of concrete entities, it signifies entities that are under the control of their master or some controlling power, displaying both the controller and his powers of control.

Through them he shines forth and hence they are to be regarded as the manifestations of his prowess and splendour. It is in this sense that the word ‘Vibhūti’ figures in the subsequent portion of the chapter. The word ‘glory’ brings out the force of this interpretation. What belongs to one and is under his effective control is his ‘Vibhūti’.

“I am the soul dwelling in the heart of all beings and I am their beginning, middle and end.” That the Supreme Being rules over all creatures as their very soul and they are under His rule as his body is the central principle. By soul we are to understand that conscious principle which sustains, actuates and owns as a means another entity and the other entity is called the body. Hence God is verily the Soul of all and all the beings, sentient and non-sentient constitute in their totality the divine body. He is the creator, preserver and destroyer of all and hence, He is described as the beginning, the middle and the end.

The relation of soul and body is such that terms denoting the body denote the soul also through that body. As the terms denoting the body never stop with that denotation but stretch up to the soul itself in their denotation, the soul may be spoken of as identical with what is signified by the terms representing the body. This is the justification of the language of identity employed in the following enumeration of the “Vibhūtis” of God.

“Among the gods known as Ādityās, I am Viṣṇu. Among luminous bodies, I am the sun. Among the Maruts, I am Marichi. Among the stars, I am the moon. Among the Vedas I am the Sāma-Veda. Among the gods, I am Indra. Among the senses, I am the mind. Among the beings with consciousness, I am consciousness. Among the gods known as Rudras, I am Śankara. Among Yakṣās and Rākṣasās, I am Kubera. Among the gods known as Vasus, I am the God Agni. Among the mountains with peaks I am Mēru. Among the priests I

am Bṛihaspati. Among the commanders of armies, I am Skanda. Among the reservoirs of water, I am the ocean. Among the great sages, I am Bhṛgu. Among words, I am the single-lettered-word Praṇava. Among sacrifices, I am the sacrifice of the nature of soft and devout recitation of sacred formula. Among mountains, I am the Himālaya. Among all the trees I am the sacred Aswattha. Among the divine sages, I am Nārada. Among the Gandharvas, I am Chitraratha. Among those accomplished in contemplation, I am Kapila. Among horses, I am Uchaiśravas, born of nectar. Among the great elephants, I am Airāvata. Among the men, I am the king. Among weapons, I am the thunderbolt. Among the cows, I am the wish-fulfilling heavenly cow Kāma-Dhēnu. Among those who cause birth, I am cupid. Among snakes, I am Vāsuki. Among many-headed serpents, I am Ananta. Among beings who live in water, I am Varuṇa. Among those who punish, I am the god of death. Among the progeny of Diti, I am Prahlāda. Among those who count for adverse purposes, I am time. Among beasts, I am the lion. Among birds I am the great Garuda, son of Vinatā. Among the moving beings, I am wind. Among those who wield weapons, I am Rāma. (Here the 'Vibhūti' is the mastery of weapons). Among water-creatures I am the king of the fishes. Among rivers I am the Ganges. In creations I am the beginning, the middle and the end. I am the creator, preserver and destroyer in all the processes of creation. I am the science of the Ātman, among the sciences. I am the disputation aiming at the discovery of truth among those who carry on controversies. Among letters, I am the first letter 'A'. Among the Samāsas, I am the Dvandwa Samāsa. I am the imperishable time. Among creators, I am the four-faced Brahma. I am death, who takes away the life of all. I am the origin of those who originate. I am Śrī, the goddess of splendour, among women; I am also reputation, speech,

remembrance, intelligence, perserverence, and forgiveness. I am Br̥hat Sāman, among all the Sāman chants. Among the metres, I am the Gāyatri metre. Among months, I am Mārgaśīrṣa. Among the seasons, I am the spring. Among gamblers, I am the gambling. I am the radiance of the radiant. I am victory in the victorious. I am the resolution in the resolute. Among the men of great minds, I am their greatness of mind. Among the persons belonging to the Vṛṣṇi clan, I am the son of Vasudeva (Here the sonship of the celebrated father is the Vibhūti). Among the sons of Pāndu, I am Arjuna. Among sages noted for seeing the nature of the Ātman through contemplation, I am Vyāsa. Among the wise ones, I am Usanas. In those who administer punishment, I am the principle of punishment. In those who pursue victory, I am the policy that leads to victory. Among the means of keeping a secret, I am silence. In men of knowledge, I am knowledge. Whatever is the seed of all beings, that I am. There is no being, either moving or non-moving, which is independent of me. There is no end to my divine glories. What I have stated to you is a presentation of the expanse of my glory under some restrictions facilitating brevity of statement.”

Among the glories of God, the most glorious in every kind has been selected and Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that He is that. The topmost in each hierarchy of forms is identified with God. The logic of this identity lies in the body-soul relationship between the glories and the divine principle functioning through them.

The general import of the part of the discourse is affirmed in the last two verses.

“Whatever existent is itself possessed of glory, is splendid, and auspicious, know that to be the outcome of a part of my radiance.” |

Just as the essential core of every entity is God dwelling in it as its very soul, even so all existences forming the most

distinguished of their kind, are the manifestations of God's beauty and power through them. Their speciality comes from their transparent disclosure of the divine in them.

“Or what avails knowing all this in detail? I remain sustaining this entire cosmos consisting of souls and bodies and of causes and effects, by a little part of myself”.

It is to be noted that from the larger metaphysical point of view the entire universe is a ‘Vibhūti’ of God, maintained through the exercise of a part of His divine power. As an exposition of the whole expanse of divine ‘Vibhūti’ is impossible, Śrī Kṛṣṇa selects the best specimens of the kingdom of nature and living beings for declaring His controlling presence in them. The greatness and splendour of them is said to issue out of this presence.

CHAPTER XI

The central theme of this chapter is the Self-revelation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna in His divine and all-inclusive form. The chapter concludes with the affirmation that Bhakti is the sole means for the knowledge, vision and attainment of God.

In confirmation of the teaching of the preceding chapter, after learning from Śrī Kṛṣṇa about His transcendent nature and His exalted attributes and infinite glories Arjuna is filled with Bhakti and in consequence ardently longs for the immediate experience of the Lord in His natural infinitude. He speaks out accordingly:

“By thy words setting forth the most secret wisdom concerning the self spoken out through gracious compassion towards me, my delusion has been annihilated. I have heard from thee extensively how all beings spring into existence from thee and how they end in thee. I have also learnt from thee of thy unsurpassed greatness. Oh! great Lord, the truth is as thou speakest. Oh, Supreme Person, I desire to see thy lordly form. If thou thinkest I can behold it, oh, Lord of infinite holy qualities, be pleased to show thyself to me, in thy entirety.”

Arjuna mentions the two great themes of the Lord's discourse and acknowledges his whole-hearted acceptance of the great truths communicated therein. He expresses a longing to perceive the Lord in His unrestricted splendour of Cosmic form. But he has the humility to submit that his prayer may be granted only in case he is deemed capable of so great a vision.

The Lord speaks:

“Behold my all-comprehending divine forms, by hundreds and thousands, of different kinds, and manifold in shapes and

colours. In my single form see the twelve Ādityas, eight Vasus, eleven Rudras, the two Aswins and the fortynine Maruts. (This is just an indication of the contents of the Supreme Form). All that is perceived in the world and all that is known through the scriptures, and countless other wonders either seen in all the worlds or known through all the scriptures are there for thee to see. In my body, in a part of thereof, the entire universe of moving and non-moving beings thou wilt see now and whatever else thou desirest to see. By thine own eyes thou wilt not be able to see me. I grant thee divine sight and see my unique and lordly Yōga of the nature of wondrous attributes and glories.”

Sanjaya speaks:

“After speaking thus, Hari, the Lord of marvellous powers and glories, revealed to Arjuna, the supreme lordly-form. That form had many faces, many eyes, exhibited manifold wonders, was adorned by many divine ornaments, holding in readiness many divine weapons, wearing divine garlands, with divine perfumes smeared all over, having its faces turned towards all the universe, and was luminous, infinite and an abode of all wonders. The illumination radiated by the form could be approached probably by the light that would be generated in the world if a thousand suns were to rise simultaneously. Arjuna beheld then the entire universe divided manifold occupying a part of that body of the God of gods. Then he, filled with wonder and with hairs standing on end, bowed to the God with his head and spoke with folded hands.’

Arjuna speaks:

“I see in thy body, oh Lord, all the gods and all the varieties of creatures. I see Brahma, Śiva who abides by the

thought of Brahma, all the sages and all serpents. I see thee, every where, of infinite form, with a multitude of faces, eyes, arms and stomachs. I see no end, no middle and no beginning of thee, oh Lord of the universe, with the universe as thy form. Thou art a huge mass of light illuminating all round. Thou wearest the crown weilding the mace and disk. I see thee, with all the light of blazing fire and sun, immeasurable and not to be fully seen. Thou art the highest imperishable reality to be known. Thou art the ultimate foundation of this universe. Thou art unchanging in they nature, attributes and glories. Thou art the protector of the Eternal Dharma; I understand thee as the primordial person. I see thee, without beginning, middle and end, with infinite power and countless arms, with the sun and moon as eyes, with the face like blazing fire and scorching this whole universe, as it were, with thy burning light. By thy single being the entire space between the earth and the sky and all the directions are pervaded. Seeing this extraordinarily wonderful and terrific form of thine, oh great one! the three worlds, consisting of thy devotees, foes and those who are indifferent to thee are troubled. Among the superior personages some who see thee, the support of the universe, are delighted and they approach thee. Some seeing thy terrific form are afraid and with folded hands speak in praise of thee according to their knowledge. The groups of great sages, who know thy reality, give utterance to benediction and praise thee as it befits thee. The groups of the Rudras, the Ādityas, the Vasus, the Sādhyas, the Aswins, the Maruts, the Manes, the Gandharvas, the Yakṣas, the Asuras and the Siddhas, see thee and are all filled with awe. This form of thine is immense, and has many faces, many eyes, many arms, many thighs, many feet, many stomachs and terrific with many teeth. Oh! great-armed one, the worlds are terrified at thy sight and so am I seeing thee touching the heavens and blazing, many-coloured and with

open mouths and with large burning eyes; my inner soul is overwhelmed and my force of life fails me. I know no peace. Seeing thy faces fierce in teeth which look like the fire destructive of the world, I cannot recognise the directions and have no joy. Oh thou! the abode of the world, the Lord of the gods, be gracious to me.

All these sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, along with groups of kings, so also Bhīṣma, Drōṇa, Karna along with the most important of our soldiers, rush towards thy mouths which are terrifying and have fierce teeth and enter them. Some of them are seen sticking between thy teeth with their heads crushed. Even as rivers, with gushing waters, rush towards the ocean, these heroes among men enter thy mouths and are in flames. Even as moths with tremendous speed fall into blazing flames heading towards destruction, the worlds with great speed enter thy mouths for self-destruction. Swallowing them all with thy flaming mouths, thou lickest them with thy tongues. Thy burning light fills the whole world and scorches it. Be pleased to tell me, who art thou of this terrific form? Thou best of the gods, I make obeisance to thee. I want to know thee, the primordial one. I do not comprehend thy ways."

The Lord speaks:

"I am Time thus developing to destroy the worlds and am engaged in withdrawing them. The soldiers gathered here for battle against thee, will not live, even if thou retire from the battle. Therefore, arise and win fame, and defeating the enemies enjoy the prosperous kingdom. These are to die at my hands inevitably and thou, Savyasāchin, be merely my instrument. Thou wilt kill Drōṇa, Bhīṣma, Jayadratha and Karna and all other great warriors, who are already killed by me. Do not grieve. Fight and thou wilt vanquish thy foes."

Sanjaya speaks:

“Having heard these words of Keṣava, folding his hands, trembling with awe, Arjuna made deep reverence to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and spoke again in choked up voice and in great fear, again bowing to Him.”

Arjuna speaks:

“It is fitting, oh thou inner controller of the senses! that by they praise the world is delighted and captivated by love; the demons run in different direction in fright; and all the Siddhas (accomplished sages) bow down in reverence. Why will they not bow down to thee, the great one, who is the first creator of even Brahma?

Thou, oh! the lord of gods!, the abode of the world, art infinite, imperishable, that which is, that which is not and that which is above both. Thou art the first God, thou art the ancient Puruṣa, thou art the final support of the universe.

Thou art the Supreme Knower and the object of knowledge. Thou art the Supreme Abode to be attained. By thee, thou of infinite form, the whole universe is permeated. Thou art Vāyu, Yama, Agni, Varuṇa, Chandra, Prajāpati and the grandfather of all beings.

Thousand salutations to thee, again I salute thee more, I salute thee more. Salutations to thee in the front and salutations to thee from behind. Oh! All! I salute thee from all sides. Thou art of infinite prowess, of unlimited dominance. Thou hast appropriated all as the soul and hence thou art ‘all’. Thinking of thee as a friend, without due humility, I have called thee ‘oh! Kṛṣṇa’ ‘oh! Yādava’ ‘oh! friend’ not knowing this greatness of thine and through inadvertence or long familiarity. I have humiliated thee in fun, while going to sleep, while at play, while seated and while dining, sometimes when we were alone and sometimes

in the presence of others. Now I beg of thee, of incomprehensible greatness, to forgive all that.

Thou art the father of the world, oh! thou of immeasurable greatness, its preceptor and so thou art most adorable. In the three worlds, there is no one who is at least thy equal; how can there be any one who is superior?

Therefore, I come to thee and bow down in obeisance placing my body at thy feet, I appeal to thee the adorable Lord, for grace. Even as a father bestows grace on a guilty son if appealed to, even as a friend is reconciled and befriends again a friend who has offended him but now pleads for gracious reconciliation, even so thou art to bear with me and shower thy grace on me, as thou lovest me and I love thee.

Beholding this unprecedented form, I am both exultant and perturbed by fear. Oh! Lord of the gods and the abode of the world, may it please thee to show thyself in your other form. Be thou gracious to me.

I want to see thee back in that previous form, with four arms wearing the crown, the mace, discuss, oh! thou thousand-armed one, of cosmic form."

The Lord speaks:

"By my grace towards thee this supreme form of mine has been shown thee, by my divine power, the form which is a mass of illumination, which includes the entire realm of existence, which is infinite and primordial and which no one other than thee has seen before. Oh! thou, hero among the Kurus, no one in this world of mortals other than thee, can behold me in this form through the mere study of the Vedas, sacrifices, charities, righteous actions and severe austerities. Do not feel oppressed, and do not get deluded seeing this awful form of mine. See again my previous form without fear and in gladness of mind."

Sanjaya speaks:

“After speaking thus to Arjuna, Vāsudeva showed him again His original form as Kṛṣṇa. He, the great-souled one, pacified the terrified Arjuna, by resuming his pleasing form.”

Arjuna speaks:

“Seeing this pleasing human form of thine, oh! Janārdana, I now recover my consciousness, as it were, and am back again in my nature.”

The Lord speaks:

“The form of mine, which is extremely difficult to see and which thou hast seen now, even the gods are always hankering to see. I, of this nature, cannot be seen, as thou hast seen me, by the mere study of the Vedas, austerities, charity and sacrifice, without devotion to me. But through undivided Bhakti, I, of this nature, can be truly known, can be truly seen, and can be truly entered into. He who does my actions, seeks me as the supreme end, is my Bhakta, not finding it possible to live without worship of me as an end in itself, is without attachment to everything else and is without enmity towards any creature, will attain me.”

The whole chapter stands summed up in the above words. It is a highly pictorial chapter and the entire revelation of the extraordinary form of God is brought in the words of Sanjaya, Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The first consideration that emerges from Rāmānuja's interpretation is that it is a revelation of ultimate Reality for him. It is neither a picture conjured up by fancy nor an account of reality from a lower point of view. In the detailed interpretation of the text there are striking points of interest. The sublime poetry of the original stands expounded in a way that does great justice to it and brings out adequately all the finer aspects of the narrative.

Some noteworthy details may be put together in illustration thereof:

- (1) Arjuna's opening speech contains a synoptic reference to what he has learnt about in the course of the discourse so far. His unconditional acceptance of the truths so communicated and the humble desire to be granted a fuller and more direct revelation is fittingly conveyed.
- (2) Kṛṣṇa as Yōgēśwara means for Rāmānuja, one who is the repository of an infinite number of auspicious attributes and the possessor of countless glories (8).
- (3) The vast universe of beings just occupies a tiny part of the boundless vista of God's form. (13)
- (4) The three worlds of beings that are said to be taken off their feet by the spectacle, are identified as three classes of souls namely those that happen to be devoted to Him, those that are hostile and those that are indifferent to Him. The three worlds are given a spiritual interpretation. (20)
- (5) The reason for the revelation of the cosmic form to these classes of beings in addition to Arjuna is said to be to show to him the fullness of glory by exhibiting the awe-inspired reactions of the admittedly superior beings to the form. (20)
- (6) The divine form is not merely all-comprehending but is very relevant to the historic situation in which Arjuna is placed. In it he sees his enemies and most of his friends also rushing towards destruction. This destructive aspect is shown to convince Arjuna that the destruction that should result from the battle is an inevitable part of the divine plan that is operative. The revelation of this is meant to eliminate his egoistic sense of becoming the agent in the huge work of destruction. This conscious-

ness and the conviction that he is merely an instrument in the hands of God, would make his share in the battle, an observance of the purest Karma-yoga as taught in the text. The revelation further answers the question that tormented Arjuna whether the contemplated destruction was not immoral. The destruction is shown as divinely executed retribution for evil-doing and hence eminently righteous. It is also to be noted that the revelation is not for the resolution of the uncertainty as to which party would be victorious, for that uncertainty never figured as a cause for Arjuna's despondency on Rāmānuja's interpretation. Incidentally, of course, the uncertainty is removed as far as Dhṛtarāṣṭra is concerned.

- (7) Many fine points are made in the explanation of the several features of the divine form. For instance, the fact that the sun and moon form the two eyes is interpreted as representing the rigours of divine justice and the soothing coolness of divine grace.
- (8) There are many fine points in the hymn of praise that Arjuna sings forth. For instance he asserts that God is "all", for He appropriates all beings as their very soul, thereby offering a magnificent interpretation of all the passages in the scriptures in which the Supreme Being is spoken of as one with the universe of finite realities. No scope is left for either a shallow pantheism or an illusionistic monism. (40)
- (9) The glorification of undivided Bhakti as the one pathway to the knowledge, vision and final attainment of God puts an end to all controversies with regard to the proximate means of release. It must be taken as a definitive statement of the philosophy of Sādhana as embodied in the *Gītā* and this is a

point of capital importance for Rāmānuja's theory of Sādhana.

- (10) In the interpretation of the last verse of the chapter Rāmānuja argues that a Bhakta must be naturally free from hatred. Hatred proceeds from the experience or fear of injury at the hands of other creatures. For a true devotee the only injury would be alienation from the Lord and that injury no other being could inflict. Only lack of devotion and the consequent withholding of grace on God's part, could bring about this calamity. Further, the other evils that overtake a devotee are explained by him as due to his own former misdeeds. He has no one else to blame. Thirdly the other beings are merely tools in the hands of God who executes His inexorable justice and they are not to be blamed as if they were independent agents. Thus there is no rational ground for hatred and hence a true Bhakta is free from hatred. This statement has great implications and we are not to work them out here. The question may be asked whether a Bhakta, in addition to being free from hatred, actually loves all beings positively and ardently. Rāmānuja does not raise or answer this question in this context. But the answer is implicit in the whole doctrine of the *Gītā* and particularly in the idea of Lōkasamgraha, urged on the analogy of God's own involvement in the cosmic concern of saving souls. It is explicitly stated in the description of the Bhakta in the next chapter, as 'Maitra' and 'Karuna'. *The doctrine of love of God as inclusive of all nature and all living beings cannot stop with the negative ethics of mere non-hatred. Hatred is just a privative condition, privative of the natural propensity of the ideal self to love God and all that belongs to Him for His sake.*

CHAPTER XII

The chapter opens with a question by Arjuna. He asks, "Between thy devotees who, thus, think of thee as their supreme object of attainment and meditate on thee by way of Bhakti and those who meditate on the unmanifested and imperishable reality, who are better?" There are two problems in connection with the question:

- (a) What is this unmanifested and imperishable reality?
- (b) What is the kind of superiority that Arjuna is thinking of, in demanding a comparative estimate?
- (c) The 'Akṣara' is used in Vedāntic literature in three senses. Firstly it is used as the name of the unmanifested root-principle of the physical universe. That meaning is to be ruled out here as the meditation on that is not prescribed anywhere either in the *Gītā* or the system of Sāṅkhya philosophy which specializes in the elaboration of the concept of this primordial material principle. The second sense is that which is attached to the term in some of the Upaniṣadic discourses, as, for instance the Mundaka and the Brhadāraṇyaka discourses of Yājñavalkya to Gārgi. In these contexts it signifies the ultimate Reality, the Brahman. Now there is no possibility of taking the term here in this sense, for, in the *Gītā*, as a whole, God, identified with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is the ultimate Brahman. If that two-fold identity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with Brahman and of Brahman with Akṣara is admitted there is no meaning in positing two kinds of meditations, one on the Akṣara and another on Kṛṣṇa and in demanding their comparative valuation. The Puruṣottama to be spoken

of in the fifteenth chapter is the highest reality for the *Gītā*. Nowhere in the text is the Puruṣottama distinguished from or taught as a lower version of the supreme principle. The term Akṣara in the eighth and thirteenth chapters also does not lend itself to an interpretation of it as standing for something surpassing or transcending the Puruṣottama. As such the distinction and need for adjudgment of relative philosophical merits do not arise at all. The third sense of the term is that it stands for the imperishable and non-material essence of the individual self. Taken in that sense it accords well with the declaration in the fifteenth chapter that the Puruṣottama surpasses the 'Akṣara', which, in its turn, accords equally well with the conception of the seventh chapter that the Jīva is one of the instrumental realities, which, however basic it may be, belongs to God and exists and functions under His all-comprehensive control. It is this third interpretation of the term that Rāmānuja adopts in the present context. It is a great merit of this interpretation that it exhibits a single line of thought as running through the seventh, eighth, twelfth and fifteenth chapters and renders the 'Brahma-bhūta' of the eighteenth chapter perfectly intelligible.

- (d) What is the kind of superiority that Arjuna wants to be attributed to the meditation on Akṣara or to that on Śrī Kṛṣṇa? The question of Arjuna cannot be interpreted as referring to superiority on the ground of the comparative status of the object of meditation, argues Rāmānuja, for it has been already declared in very emphatic terms at the grand conclusion of sixth chapter that those who practise meditation on Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the supreme deity, are the

greatest of the Yōgins. So the superiority under question must be interpreted as referring to speed of fructification and facility or ease from the point of view of adoption.

With these two clarifications we may proceed to study the chapter in the light of the commentary.

The answer is crisply stated immediately. Those whose minds are fixed on God, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as their end, who seek abiding union with Him and who possess supreme and eager faith, are the best. But those who meditate on the imperishable principle, which is indescribable, imperceptible all-pervasive, inconceivable, universal, being undifferentiated by bodily determinations, unchanging and eternal, and that by controlling their senses, thinking of all beings as equal and engaged in the good of all, also attain Him. But the devotees of the unmanifested have greater hardships to undergo, for, the embodied beings find the ideal of the unmanifested extremely difficult to attain. The condition of the devotees of the Lord is decidedly superior. Those who surrender all their actions to God, seek Him as their supreme end and practise meditation on Him with supreme love looking upon His worship as itself the end, God himself will rescue soon from the world of bondage which is death itself as it obstructs the individual's attainment of God. For this reason Śrī Kṛṣṇa exhorts Arjuna: "Therefore meditate on me, as I am the supreme goal, and as I am attainable easily and quickly. Meditate on me as the supreme object of your spiritual endeavour. Immediately after you fix your mind on me as the supreme object, you will find yourself living in me."

The fundamental answer to Arjuna's question is furnished in this declaration which is also an exhortation containing heartening assurance. "If such a concentration of mind is not possible for you in a steady manner, practise loving remembrance of my perfections and then gain steady con-

centration of mind on me through that loving remembrance of me. Through that concentration seek to attain me. If you find yourself incapable of even that remembrance, engage yourself in acts of worship of me with great love. Through such worship you will gain the capacity for remembrance and through the remembrance you will gain the required concentration by which you will reach me. If that worship also is beyond you, then practise Karma-yōga involving the renunciation of the fruits of actions, which will lead you to self-realization which in turn makes you fit for Bhakti.” The hierarchy of means advocated here is to be noted clearly. The highest Bhakti effectuates immediately God-realization through the grace of God. If that is found difficult Abhyāsa in the sense of frequent contemplation of God’s perfections is to be practised as a means to that Bhakti. If the Abhyāsa is also found difficult, loving worship in the sense of acts of adoration is prescribed as a means to that Abhyāsa. If such worship is also beyond the aspirant, he is advised to adopt Karma-yōga as a means to the realization of the intrinsic nature of the individual self. That realization will make him fit for progressive cultivation of Bhakti. The incapacity for Bhakti is rooted in the ignorance of the real nature of the self. If that obstacle is removed through Karma-yōga and Jñāna-yōga, the way for the origin and development of Bhakti is cleared. The individual is then irresistably drawn into the full tide of the fervent love of God.

The remembrance of God, when there is no love towards Him, is very difficult and therefore the knowledge of the self by way of immediate intuition is superior to it from the point of view of effective practice. But this knowledge is itself no easy achievement. When it is difficult of achievement, the contemplation of the essential nature of the self is better, again from the point of view of practice. When that contemplation is not established and is itself hard, it’s means,

namely, Karma-yōga is better for practice. Karma-yōga creates the right state of mind for contemplation by the removal of impurities born of sins. In that state of mind contemplation of the self is easy. That contemplation leads to the realization of the self's essential nature. Such self-realisation inducts the aspirant into the process of Bhakti. Thus for those who are incompetent for Bhakti, self-knowledge is better and for those who are incompetent for self-knowledge, the pathway of Karma is better. From the point of view of the competence of the aspirant, these various steps have been evaluated in this fashion and nothing is said here that would take away the highest position of value accorded to Bhakti.

There is a possible objection to the statement here. The devotee of God is placed above the devotee of the Imperishable on the ground that his way is easier and quicker in yielding its results. Now the contemplation of the Imperishable is recommended in case the devotion to God is found difficult. Are not both the ways pronounced more difficult and easier at the same time? But we are to understand that Bhakti is better for one who can practise it and for him to adopt the other way is to choose the longer and more arduous road while he is competent to take the shorter and easier one. The lower steps are praised as better for one, who is spiritually backward and not advanced in inner life as required for the practice of Bhakti. While the exaltation of Bhakti is in relation to those who are worthy of it, the praise of the other instrumental levels of spiritual endeavour is in relation to those who are unhappily less advanced. The course of the commentary elucidates the whole position with all the needed clarity.

From the thirteenth verse to the nineteenth the matter dealt with according to Rāmānuja consists of the characteristics that an ideal Karma-yōgin ought to cultivate.

“He does not hate even those who injure him. He thinks of them in the spirit of friendship. When they are in distress, he is compassionate towards them. He has no attachment to anything. He is free from the identification of the body with the soul. He is free from worldly exultations and depressions and endures serenely the adverse circumstances of life. He is easily satisfied with whatever he can get as a means of subsistence. He always reflects upon the nature of the self as transcending matter. He controls his mental functions. He has a firm conviction in the affirmations of the scriptures dealing with the self. His mind and will are wholly surrendered to me. He thinks of me as the sole object of worship and as the sole fulfiller of the spiritual destiny of the worshippers. He, who thus worships me through Karma-yōga, is dear to me. He who does nothing injurious to the world, with reference to whom, the world does nothing injurious seeing that he hates none, and who is free from worldly exultation, intolerance, fear and the feeling of being injured, is dear to me. He, who desires nothing other than the self in its purity, who is pure, competent in acts of righteousness, who is indifferent to all else, who is not perturbed by pains and adversities overtaking him while he is engaged in the fulfilment of his duties, and who avoids all enterprize other than what is demanded by the call of righteousness, such a devotee is dear to me. He who does not rejoice on getting what the world values, does not grieve in circumstances which the world regards as a calamity, does not desire anything that the worldly seek, and renounces merit also calculated to be instrumental to worldly advantages as he does demerit leading to disadvantages, such a devotee is dear to me. That devotee who is free from all agitations of mind in the company of enemies and friends, in honour and humiliation, in the grip of dualities like pains and pleasures, heat and cold, who is detached, is the same when praised and abused, who is

calmly silent, pleased with whatever he can obtain, has no abode of his own, but is steadily contemplating the self, is dear to me.”

While so far we have, on this interpretation, the description of the ideal Karma-yōgin, the next concluding verse is devoted to the delineation of the Bhakta of Bhakti-yōga proper.

“But they who fully practise the Bhakti-yōga, as described before, which is a means that is equal in value and the experiential quality of joy to the end itself, who are inspired by eager faith and who are devoted to me as the supreme end, are extremely dear to me.”

A few words may be said in justification of applying the earlier description of the Bhakta to the Karma-yōgin and in taking the concluding verse as giving the estimate of the Bhakta proper.

The earlier description just follows immediately the prescription of Karma-yōga¹ and the Bhakta of the last verse is distinguished from the Bhakta spoken of before by the expression ‘Tu’ (But) and he is said to be most dear to God. That the last verse is given to the praise of the highest Bhakta is unmistakable. The initial connection with Karma-yōga and the assignment of the highest status to the devotee indicated in the culminating verse, render the intermediate description from the thirteenth to nineteenth verse, applicable only to the Karma-yōgin, who is also a Bhakta in some measure. This justification is very effectively brought out by Vedānta Deśika’s discussion of the context.

This chapter sums up the climax of the teaching developed in the *Gītā* so far. It is a fitting culmination of the doctrine of the way, which starts with Karma-yōga, progresses through Jñāna-yōga and attains its consummation in Bhakti-yōga.

CHAPTER XIII

With this chapter, on Rāmānuja's interpretation, the *Gītā* commences a new manner of treatment. It reconsiders and clarifies the principles expounded in the twelve chapters so far, forming into two distinct groups each consisting of six chapters. The whole scheme of the *Gītā* is indicated in the introduction to this chapter by Rāmānuja and the scope and nature of the remaining group of six chapters is also outlined. The first group aims at presenting the ideal of self-realization to be achieved through Karma-yōga and Jñāna-yōga. This self-realization is instrumental to the emergence of Bhakti-yōga. The second group directly deals with the nature of the Supreme Reality and Bhakti-yōga. In the third group of six chapters, the subject-matter of the former two groups of chapters, namely, Prakṛiti, Puruṣa, their mutual association which constitutes the world, the Supreme Being, Karma, Jñāna and Bhakti are reconsidered critically and their final nature is determined.

The contents of the thirteenth chapter naturally fall within the theme of the third group of chapters. They are analysed into the following topics:

- (a) The nature of the body and the soul.
- (b) The clarification of the nature of the body.
- (c) The method of realizing the nature of the self as transcending the body.
- (d) The clarification of the nature of the pure self.
- (e) The cause that brings about the association of the self with matter.
- (f) The manner of contemplating the mutual distinctness of the self and matter.

The first verse offers the definition of the two crucial terms of the chapter. They are Kṣetra (the field) and Kṣetrajña (the knower of the field). Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that we should understand by Kṣetra the body and by Kṣetrajña, the one who knows the body.

The self is the subject of knowledge and the body, though identified with the self in popular thought and though inseparable from the self is an object of knowledge. It is true that when the self contemplates objects other than the body, it is apt to assimilate the body to the knower. But when it directs its cognitive consciousness on the body itself the latter is no less an object than other objects. This differential relation to knowledge, establishes the distinction between the self and its material field of manifestation. The knower, by virtue of being the subject of knowledge, is fundamentally other than all that constitutes the object of knowledge including the body.

The idea of the distinction between the knower and his object is a fundamental one. It needs a little clarification on two points.

- (1) What if the object of knowledge is just another self? The idea is not invalidated by that fact, for the latter only serves to establish the plurality of selves.
- (2) But is there no self-knowledge, wherein the subject and object are to be supposed identical? Self-awareness is not to be ruled out for it is the pre-supposition of all the awareness of all objects. But in self-awareness, the self is conscious of itself as the self, as 'I' and not as an 'it', or 'this' or 'thou'. It is not a consciousness that objectifies, it is simple self-identification, it is the subject of knowledge asserting to itself, as it were, its subjectivity. "But" it may be argued "Rāmānuja ascribes to a considerable part of the *Gītā* the teaching of the means

to self-knowledge, the intuition of the real nature of the self". But such self-intuition consists of the direct apprehension of the self as distinct from the non-self. Even this account of the knower of the field only aims at such discriminative understanding. It is not so much an objectification of the self, as a clear grasp of its transcendence of all objects. What is grasped as the subject in self-consciousness is explicated through philosophical analysis and the implication of its distinctness from the non-self is worked out into explicit recognition. The self transcends the non-self by virtue of its not being an object and by the fact of its being aware of itself only as the subject. The clearer and fuller understanding of this truth is all that is attained by the philosophy of the self and the spiritual discipline aiming at self-realization.

The next verse (2) is important from the metaphysical point of view and the longest disunion in Rāmānuja's commentary occurs in connection with it.

"Know that I am the knower of the field also in all the fields. It is the knowledge of the field and the knower of the field that is knowledge worthy of pursuit in my judgment." The first half of the verse seems to identify the individual soul, designated here as 'Kṣetrajña' with Īśwara, the Supreme Deity. But Rāmānuja rejects that interpretation on the ground that the text implies by the word 'Api' meaning 'also', that exactly a similar identification is meant between God and the Kṣetra. Surely God is not the same as the physical world on any view which admits the existence of God. That identification must be interpreted in the sense of immanence, in the sense that God is one with nature being its inner controller. Precisely the same sense of identity should be understood as existing between Him and the

individual self. Immanence of the soul in the body affords perfect justification for the language of identity. God's immanence in the world of nature and individual souls is exactly of such a nature and hence the employment of the language of identity is not merely valid but is actually called for. The knowledge that is praised as worthy of pursuit is the knowledge of the distinction between the Kṣetra and Kṣetrajña along with the knowledge of their together constituting the body of God. After thus stating the import of the verse, Rāmānuja starts his discussion.

The alternative interpretation adopted by Advaita is stated briefly. "The identity between Brahman and the Jīva, affirmed in the text, may be accepted in a straight-forward manner. The supreme principle appears as the individual owing to the force of ignorance. This teaching of identity is for removing that ignorance. Just as the teaching 'This is no snake, it is just a rope' puts an end to the illusion of snake, even so the teaching of the benevolent Lord, puts an end to the illusion of individuality that sets up the Kṣetrajña as a reality other than the Īśwara."

Rāmānuja rejects this position and offers a single argument against it.

"Does the great God, Vāsudeva, who teaches, know the ultimate reality and is He free from ignorance? If He is, He could have no illusion of other selves, and could not, therefore, entertain the idea of Arjuna's existence and permit Himself to engage in the instruction of Arjuna. If, on the other hand, He has not realized the absolute unity of the Ātman, He could not, being Himself ignorant, be a teacher of that truth. The *Gītā* tells us that only the seers of truth become teachers proper (IV. 34). This dilemma is enough of a counter-blast to the interpretation advanced."

Really Rāmānuja's criticism of the Advaitic interpretation is two-fold.

- (1) There is the textual criticism emphasizing the significance of 'Api'.
- (2) This one is an independent criticism reducing to absurdity the possibility of any preceptor imparting to his disciple the tenets of Advaita.

After this brief polemical interlude Rāmānuja gives us what may be regarded both as a synopsis of his general philosophical position and also as an outline of his procedure in interpreting the texts of the Upaniṣads and the *Gītā*. His argument can be reduced to nine fundamental propositions.

- (1) There are several passages in the principal Upaniṣads and the *Gītā*, which sharply distinguish the self from physical reality and distinguish both from the Supreme Lord. They define the distinctive nature of each of these three principles. This philosophical discrimination of nature, the finite self and God is a fundamental truth.
- (2) There is another class of texts which characterize the finite selves and nature as the body of God and God as their 'inner ruler', their innmost soul, sustaining, activating and utilizing them in a relation of utmost intimacy and inseparability. This truth concerning God as constituting the ultimate soul of all is also fundamental, as it completes the discriminative knowledge by discerning the relation bringing to an organic integration the entities so distinguished.
- (3) On the basis of this organic relation in terms of soul and body, there are some passages, which assert that God alone is the reality comprehending the finite reals, material and spiritual, as modes of Himself, or as adjectival to Himself. To inculcate this truth they affirm that He is the world, whether the latter is in the causal state of non-manifestation

or in the state of the effect, under conditions of manifestation. Even while affirming this unity the passages in question do not cancel or ignore the discrimination effected by the first group of passages.

- (4) The cause in this cosmic context is God containing within Himself, as adjectival to Himself, the material and spiritual realities in their subtle state of bare potentiality. The effect is God as similarly comprehending the physical universe and the finite selves in their state of explication and actuality. The cause and effect therefore are not two distinct entities but are substantially one. The unfoldment into explicitness is the meaning of the process of causation. On this principle then, the understanding of the causal nature of Brahman comprehending the world in its causal form, is an understanding of the totality of existence, for the latter is just the translation of the cause into manifest manifoldness. Thus the dictum of the Upaniṣads concerning “one knowledge” as inclusive of ‘all knowledge’ is readily comprehensible. All the statements which speak of this all-inclusive knowledge of the primordial reality stand clearly explained.
- (5) The names of objects in the well-differentiated world of effects signify those objects and through them the ultimate principle that dwells in them as their soul. Hence the terms representing Brahman in its causal aspect and the terms representing the effects can be used as applying to the same entity. This is ‘Samanādhikarāṇya’, application of terms with diversity of connotation to the same subject, as that is the substance qualified by all the qualities connoted by the several terms.

- (6) Brahman is the material cause of the world, for it is from Brahman as qualified by the world in its subtle form that the effect consisting of Brahman as qualified by the world in its manifested form springs into being. If the cause and effect are construed in their concrete totality including Brahman and His modes, either in their potential or actual forms, the fact of Brahman being the material cause cannot be missed. The totality is to be described as Brahman, for in that complex whole, Brahman is the dominant and all-including principle. In spite of this material causality of Brahman, there is no transposition of the distinctive natures of entities involved in the causal process. The material principle unmanifested in the causal state becomes the manifested material principle as effect. The finite soul whose consciousness is withdrawn and at its minimum in the causal state becomes the active individual self of the actual world with all the outgoing of consciousness implied in the condition of effect. Brahman ensouling the world of potentiality evolves into Brahman ensouling the world of actuality. As Brahman is all in all in both states, Brahman is the cause as well as the effect and at the same time the purity and transcendence of Brahman remain in their entirety, for He transforms Himself not into the world but into Himself as possessing that world in its actuality.
- (7) The passages that speak of Brahman as "attributeless" mean that attributes of the nature of imperfection are not to be predicated of Him. There are passages that deny evil attributes of Brahman and also predicate perfections. They furnish the guidance for the right interpretation of the texts that characterize Brahman as attributeless.

- (8) There are passages that speak of Brahman as 'knowledge' or 'consciousness'. They are not to be taken as positing mere consciousness or knowledge as the ultimate principle. Brahman is the omniscient spirit and knowledge or consciousness is His defining attribute. Such an interpretation is enforced by the passages that describe Him as the supreme or all-knowing 'knower'. Further the essence of Brahman is self-consciousness, and as such He is describable as consciousness. Knowledge is His pre-eminent attribute and His substantive nature is self-luminous. These two considerations throw decisive light on the texts describing Brahman as consciousness or knowledge. The All-knowing and self-knowing nature of Brahman is emphasized by saying that He is knowledge. There is no element of 'unknowing' in Him.
- (9) The Upaniṣads declare that the inconceivably manifold world of existence has sprung from a single source. Brahman willed to be many and manifested Himself through all the multiplicity of modes, both sentient and non-sentient. In the light of this truth we are to construe the passages that deny plurality. That denial could only mean that a plurality not constituting a mode or embodiment of Brahman does not exist. Plurality of beings integrated to a single principle by way of being its body or mode is an admitted truth. Only its antithesis, pure or absolute plurality of independent entities, stands negated. The negation must be interpreted as an implication of the affirmation. Plurality of substantives is denied and not a plurality of adjectival modes.

Concerning this issue Advaita has a definite standpoint. Instead of modifying the denial of plurality as signifying the

denial of independent plurality, it takes it as representing an absolute denial of plurality, not excluding the plurality that is subsumed under the all-comprehending reality of Brahman in the passages speaking of Brahman as differentiating itself into the many. In fact the denial of that plurality is its primary aim. The denial of independent plurality is already involved in the texts tracing the manifold existents to the single cause, namely, Brahman. The creation-texts have no other positive purport and they serve merely to ascribe all plurality to Brahman, as a dimension of its creative self-manifestation, for purposes of negating its independent existence. The next moment of negation is represented by the texts that simply negate plurality and they deny even dependent plurality. Thus the negation of plurality is completed, there is no plurality either independent of Brahman or as belonging to it in any way. Such is the nature of the unreal, it cannot be ascribed to its real substratum nor can it be allocated to an independent sphere of being. The upshot is that the creation-texts deny independent plurality and the texts simply negating plurality deny it of Brahman. If the Upaniṣads had only one of these two types of texts, the possibility would remain that they admit either dependent or independent plurality. The total negation is accomplished by the presence of these two classes of texts. As a clear intance of this use of the two classes of texts, a passage of *Vivaraṇa* would serve. (page 207—Benares edition).

The radical contrast between the two interpretations is obvious. For Rāmānuja the affirmation in the creation-texts is primary and the texts negating plurality just clarify their purport by drawing out their negative implication. For Advaita the texts denying plurality are primary and the creation-texts, while not being true in their positive meaning, support the general negation of plurality by the negation of independent plurality, which negation is implied in the idea

of creation. In other words Rāmānuja restricts the scope of the negation of plurality to that of independent plurality and makes it subordinate to the thesis of creation; Advaita retains the absoluteness of the negation of plurality and makes the creation-idea subserve that negation, by cancelling plurality independent of Brahman.

Two remarks may be ventured on the interpretation favoured by Advaita:

- (a) If the negative texts, i.e., the texts denying all plurality whatever are taken literally and in their full force of unrestricted negation, there is no necessity for the creation-texts, which can accomplish only restricted negation and that of plurality independent of Brahman, already included in the grand vista of negation covered by the other texts.
- (b) The creation-texts, whatever be the range of negation of plurality intended by the other texts, cannot serve the purpose ascribed to them. Their efficacy in negating plurality independent of Brahman directly depends upon what they affirm. They affirm that Brahman has differentiated itself into the diversified world. If that affirmation is not taken seriously and is regarded as an error indulged in for a certain purpose, the negation of independent plurality does not at all follow. The negative implication stands annihilated if the affirmation carrying that implication is disowned. Hence the creation-texts perpetrate a *futile error*.

They are both *unnecessary* and *ineffective* for the intended purpose.

After this discussion Rāmānuja resumes the task of elucidating the text.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa undertakes to instruct Arjuna briefly on the nature, the modifications, the ground and the purpose of

Kṣetra and what phenomena it supports, along with the nature and the powers of the Kṣetrajña. These principles have been described by the great sages in their works, by all the different branches of the Vedas and also by the Brahma-Sutras, which reason out the teachings and determine the doctrines in a conclusive manner.

Two verses (5 and 6) set forth the nature and modifications of the Kṣetra in a brief manner. The factors that produce the Kṣetra are the five great elements, the ego, intellect and the unmanifested. The five elements are earth, water, fire, air and space (ether). By the ego or Ahankāra is meant that aspect of it which generates the elements. By Buddhi or intellect is meant the cosmic principle, Mahan, which on the cosmic plane constitutes the basis of individual intellects. The unmanifested or Avyakta means the root-principle of all material existence. These principles furnish the raw materials out of which the Kṣetra or the body is formed. The factors that are housed in and supported by the body are the senses and the objects of the senses. The senses are eleven; five are cognitive organs, five are organs of action and the Manas or mind. The objects of the senses are sound, touch, colour, taste and odour. Desire, aversion, pleasure and pain, are qualities of the self but they arise on account of the self's involvement in the body. Hence they are enumerated as the effects of the body. The aggregate of the formative factors, which supports the life of the conscious principle in the state of embodiment is the body; the body supports the conscious principle in its career of the experience of pleasures and pains and in its efforts towards bondage or liberation. Since the mundane individual's experiences as well as activities obtain on the physical basis of the body, the organic aggregate is named the 'Support of the conscious principle'. The comprehensive definition of the Kṣetra is "*the aggregate produced by Avyakta, Mahan, Ahankāra and*

the five elements, which supports the senses, which produces modifications of the nature of pleasure, pain, desire and aversion, and whose purpose is to furnish a physical basis for the experiences and activities of the conscious principle.”

Among the modification of the Kṣetra, there are some which are to be specially cultivated, for they facilitate the knowledge of the self. They are enumerated in five verses (from 7 to 11). They are the following:

“Absence of pride that would induce one to insult superiors, abstaining from actions calculated to acquiring reputation for holiness, abstaining from injury to other beings in thought, word and deed, freedom from anger towards those who may inflict injury on oneself, sincerity consisting of oneness of thought, word and deed towards others, devout service and worship of the preceptor who imparts knowledge of the Ātman, purity of the nature of the observance of ordained rules capable of bringing about fitness for the knowledge of the Ātman, steadfastness in the truth proclaimed by the scriptures about the Ātman, the withdrawal of the mind from all that is alien to the end of self-realization, renunciation of the sense-objects with the understanding of their tainted nature, freedom from the identification of the soul with the body, freedom from the feeling of ownership towards things that do not belong to the self, the understanding of the inevitability of the evils of birth, death, old age, disease and suffering in the embodied state, non-attachment towards all possessions apart from the self, non-attachment towards sons, wives and houses, in ways not connected with their utilization for purposes of righteousness, absence of exultation and depression in circumstances favourable and unfavourable according to the worldly sense of values, undivided devotion to the Supreme Lord, dwelling in solitude, absence of hankering for company, steady devotion to the knowledge of the Ātman and continuous reflection that would

result in the understanding of the Ātman.” These are the means of knowledge. These are the modifications of the Kṣetra useful to the spiritual aspirant after knowledge and all others are the hindrances to self-knowledge and hence are called ignorance.

If this is the discipline leading to knowledge, the object of knowledge is to be determined. The object is the Kṣetrājña, the knower. Six verses summarize the nature and characteristics of the Kṣetrājña. (12–17)

The knowledge of the Kṣetrājña leads to immortality. The individual spirit, named here the Kṣetrājña, is without beginning and therefore has no end either. It has as its supreme end or goal the supreme spirit. It is not curtailed or restricted by the body. It transcends the material universe. The material universe passes through two states, the subtle and the gross. The spiritual principle is to be distinguished from matter of both the states. The self in its pure state is capable of unlimited cognition and unlimited action. It transcends the bounds of space and its power is co-terminous with that of the universe.

It comprehends the external world through the operations of all the senses but in its essential nature it is independent of the senses. In essence it is not bound up with the body, but in its embodied condition it can sustain bodies of all kinds. Essentially it is free from the three qualities of Prakṛti but can also experience these qualities. It lives beyond matter and can also live in and through it. It is motionless and stable and at the same time is moving in the state of embodiment. As it is extremely subtle, even though it dwells within the living body, it is incomprehensible as different from the body. To those who have cultivated the spiritual virtues mentioned above, it is very near, while to the others, without them, it is very far though it lives in them. The fundamental nature of all finite selves is the same but still in the

ignorant who identify themselves with the bodies, they appear to be divided into several kinds. The self is different from the body, as it sustains the living body in the condition of life. The sustainer and the sustained are naturally different. It enables the living body to take in material nourishment. The principle that activates this process is different from the matter taken in as nourishment. The self is responsible for the process that converts the food taken in by the living body into the substance of its own constitution. For this reason also it should be distinguished from the matter so converted. The body bereft of the self can neither take in nourishment nor assimilate it. The functions characteristic of the living body demonstrate the presence of a principle in it transcending the mere body. The self is the light of lights. The physical lights are luminous by courtesy; the real light is the light of knowledge and this is the inherent power of the self. The self is beyond the darkness of mere materiality. Therefore it should be understood as characterized solely by knowledge. This understanding arises through the virtues mentioned before. The self dwells in the hearts of all beings.

Thus the body, the soul and the virtues leading to the knowledge of the soul are briefly stated. It is said that a devotee of God, acquires likeness to his object of worship by knowing these great varieties.

The fact of association between the self and matter, which radically differ in nature, is to be described. The association is said to be beginningless. In the condition of such association the self and body perform distinctive functions. There is a definite cause for this association. Now these points about the mutual association of the self and body, are formulated in clear terms.

Prakṛti and Puruṣa are beginningless realities: In the state of their combination, Prakṛti is responsible for the modifications that bind the Puruṣa and it gives rise to those

qualities also that help the emancipation of the Puruṣa. It is Prakṛti as presided over by Puruṣa, that is responsible for the activities of the body and the sense-organs. The Puruṣa's responsibility in the matter lies only in his presiding over the Prakṛti. Puruṣa's volition involved in his presiding over Prakṛti is his activity. In the state of association with Prakṛti, the Puruṣa is the locus of experiences of the nature of pleasure and pain. Puruṣa as associated with Prakṛti experiences the pleasures and pains which are the effects of the three qualities of Prakṛti.

The cause for the Puruṣa's association with Prakṛti may be described in the following way. The Puruṣa may happen to be embodied in a particular body. He gets interested in seeking certain pleasures and tries to avoid certain pains that are open to that body and are caused by Prakṛti in the form of that body. Accordingly he engages in actions for procuring those pleasures and for eliminating the pains. The actions may be virtuous or vicious. In order to undergo the consequences of those actions he transmigrates in course of time into good or bad embodiments. Then again he initiates actions. As a result he is re-born again. Thus as long as he does not develop the virtues which would enable him to realize his pure self, he keeps on moving in this world of transmigration.

This is the significance of the brief statement of the text "the cause of good or bad births is the entanglement in the Guṇas of Prakṛti", by way of concern either positive or negative in their effects of the nature of pleasure and pain.

The self is the over-lord of the body, wills the activities of the body, consents to their continuance, sustains the body in its condition of a living organism and experiences the pleasures and pains produced by the processes of the body. In relation to the body the transcendent Puruṣa is said to be the supreme self, even as he is its over-lord, as it were.

He who understands this Puruṣa of the aforesaid nature and Prakṛti as described herein, along with the Guṇas, to be described in the sequel, does not get re-incarnated, however wretched his present condition may be.

Those, whose power of contemplation is ripe, intuit the Puruṣa within the body through their power of contemplation. Others, whose power of contemplation is not developed, develop it through the practice of the path of knowledge and then intuit the Puruṣa. Still others, unfit for the practice of the path of knowledge and also some of those who are fit for it but seek an easy way and also those who want to set an example for others, attain fitness for contemplation by the way of action which includes within itself an element of knowledge and thus intuit the Ātman. Still others, not capable of undertaking any of these methods for self-intuition, learn them from the seers of the self and then practise them. They also get beyond the realm of mortality, through the attainment of self-vision. Even those who simply listen to discourses on the this theme with earnestness, will get cleansed of their sins, gradually ascend to the cultivation of these ways and thus eventually pass-beyond the bounds of death.

Whatever creature is born in the world, either moving or non-moving, is born out of the combination of these two fundamental principles. In spite of this close association, whoever sees the selves as equal being of the nature of knowers in spite of the diversity of their bodies and as imperishable though inhabiting perishable bodies, sees the Puruṣa aright, who is the lord of the body. He who sees this Lord of the body in this aspect of essential equality, whatever be the body he dwells within does not ruin himself but reaches the highest goal of self-realization. He who sees otherwise drives himself towards self-destruction in bondage. He who sees Prakṛti as the source of all activities and sees the Puruṣa, the knower, as involved in presiding over Prakṛti and in

experiencing the pleasures and pains produced by Prakṛti owing to ignorance brought about by previous Karma, and as being in essential nature not involved in action, sees the Puruṣa truly. When the diversity of beings is discovered to be solely belonging to Prakṛti the self as possessing unbounded knowledge is immediately attained. The self so discriminated is no product and is free from the qualities of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas, and therefore it does not decay and does not cause actions. It is not contaminated by the characteristics of the body.

Just as space is associated with all objects and still, being subtle, does not acquire the characteristics of those objects, the self, being exceedingly subtle, does not get tainted by the characteristics of the body, inspite of pervading it. Just as the single sun illumines this whole world by his effulgence, even so does the Kṣetrajña illumine the whole body with the light of knowledge. It follows, on the analogy of sun, the illuminer, being different from the illumined world, the self, the knower, transcends the material body, which is the object of its knowledge. Those who comprehend the distinction between the Kṣetra and Kṣetrajña and also the means to be adopted for effecting the emancipation of the Kṣetrajña from the bonds of Prakṛti, and follow that way of emancipation attain the ultimate blessedness of self-realization.

CHAPTER XIV

The content of this chapter is an elaboration of what has been briefly mentioned in the previous one. It was said in it that the Puruṣa is bound in Prakṛti on account of his concern with the pleasures and pains brought about by the Guṇas of Prakṛti. In this chapter, firstly, the ways in which the Guṇas bind the Puruṣa are explained and secondly, the means for the redemption from the Guṇas is determined. With this two-fold theme in view the chapter illumines an important aspect of the inter-relation between Puruṣa and Prakṛti.

The knowledge about to be imparted is praised as being most important concerning Puruṣa and Prakṛti, for it enables the contemplative sages to cross over from the realm of transmigration to that of the perfection of eternal life. The effective adoption of this knowledge renders one exceedingly similar to God Himself, for through it one goes beyond birth and death.

“I introduce the living souls in that great principle of mine, which is the source of all beings in their physical aspect. This association of the two principles brought about by me is what brings into being all the creatures. Whatever creatures spring into life, in the ordinary course of nature also, have thus the great material principle as their source and me as their father”.

This is the account of creation and the birth of beings that Śrī Kṛṣṇa offers as an introduction to the main teaching of the chapter.

The self placed in Prakṛti is bound by the Guṇas that belong to Prakṛti. These Guṇas are inoperative when Prakṛti is unmanifested but are active in the products of Prakṛti.

Their existence and activity are cognizable only on the basis of the effects they produce. They fetter the soul under conditions of creation, brought about by the association of Puruṣa and Prakṛti. The Puruṣa is free and pure by himself but in the condition of embodiment he gets tied up by the Guṇas.

The forms of these three Guṇas are to be ascertained and the manner in which each of them binds the soul is to be understood.

Among these three Sattva does not obstruct the manifestation of knowledge and happiness and hence it is known as stainless. On account of this nature, from its operation arise knowledge and happiness. *It binds the soul by implanting in it an attachment to knowledge and happiness.* In short Sattva generates conditions of knowledge and happiness and also generates a hankering for knowledge and happiness. Rajas is the source of passion. Passion is lust. Rajas is the birth-place, as it were, of sense-desires and of the desire for association with such as sons and friends. Rajas binds the soul to action through desires. The actions impelled by desires, when performed by individuals, lead to reincarnation according to those actions. Thus Rajas binds the soul through the creation of attachment to actions. *Rajas is the cause of passion, desire for sense-objects, the clinging to certain persons and the attachment to actions.*

Tamas is born of wrong understanding and gives rise to wrong understanding. It binds the soul through inadvertence, inertia, and sleep. Inadvertence is of a nature to induce exertion in directions other than the right ones. The disinclination to engage in any action whatever is inertia. Sleep is the condition in which the sense-activities are suspended. When only the external sense are suspended we have dream, and when the mind is also suspended we have deep sleep.

What is of most weight in these Guṇas in the matter of effecting the bondage of the Puruṣa must be specifically

pointed out. The most important effect of Sattwa is that it creates attachment to pleasure, while Rajas has as its most important effect the attachment to action. Tamas covers up authentic knowledge, gives rise to wrong understanding and thus engenders attachment to actions contrary to one's moral obligations.

Now these qualities are all inherent in Prakṛti which takes on the form of the body. They abide always characterizing Prakṛti. How can they generate effects which are incompatible? The three Guṇas have mutually contrary effects and they ever-lastingly co-inhere in Prakṛti. Will not the several effects get cancelled in the final outcome? The answer lies in the fact that the qualities function with varying relative potency owing to the past Karma of the individual in question. Sometimes Sattva predominates suppressing the other two, sometimes Rajas predominates similarly and sometimes Tamas functions keeping the other two at the minimum. As to which Guṇa is predominant at a particular situation, we are to be guided by the observed effects. When intellectual illumination arises in an individual through all the channels of knowledge, we are to construe that Sattva is dominant in that individual at that time. When niggardliness, restlessness, engagement in actions calculated to bring about advantageous results, uncontrolled indulgence in sense-propensities and the desire for sense-objects are found we are to infer that Rajas is predominating in the individual at the time. When knowledge does not arise, when there is inertia, when there is the inadvertence leading to performance of evil actions, and when there is wrong understanding, we are to make out that Tamas is the dominating Guṇa at the time. If a man dies when Sattva is dominant in him, he attains birth among the holy ones who know the highest. If he dies when under the dominance of Rajas, he gets reborn among those who are attached to actions of a utilitarian type. If he dies when Tamas is

dominant, he gets reborn in a species of creatures noted for lack of intelligence. In that birth he cannot attempt the realization of any good whatever.

What are the leading effects of these Guṇas. From Sattva arises knowledge, from Rajas arises keen interest in wordly advantages either natural or supernatural, and from Tamas we have as effects inadvertence leading to evil actions, wrong understanding, greater Tamas and finally absence of understanding itself. The persons established in Sattva ascend ever higher and higher, those established in Rajas go round and round in the transmigratory cycle and the lot of those who are steeped in Tamas is progressive degradation in the scale of life.

How those who are established in Sattva gradually ascend even beyond the sway of the Guṇas is brought out now.

He who sees the Guṇas as the governing forces in all action, for the soul in bondage acts, not by its inherent nature, but as propelled by the Guṇas determined by past Karma, and apprehends the self as beyond those actions and as of the nature of knowledge, attains to likeness to the Supreme Deity. The likeness to the Supreme Deity lies in the fact that he transcends the three Guṇas, sees the pure self in its essential nature and freed from birth, death, old age and suffering, experiences the immortal Ātman.

Arjuna interposes at this stage and raises a question concerning the characteristics of the person who has transcended the three Guṇas and the exact way to achieve that transcendence.

Arjuna asks: "What are the distinguishing features of the man who has gone beyond the three Guṇas? What is the conduct that reveals his nature? Through what means does he succeed in getting beyond the three Guṇas?"

Śrī Kṛṣṇa answers:

“The supreme characteristic of the man who has gone beyond the power of the Guṇas is that he is free from all involvement in the Guṇas. He does not hate the effects of the Guṇas, of the nature of illumination, activity and delusion if they happen to be undersirable from a standpoint other than the one for which the self is the supreme object of interest. What is undesirable from the worldly point of view is not an object of aversion to him. In the same way what is of value from a point of view for which the supreme object of interest is not the self, is not desired by him. Illumination, activity and delusion that are desirable from other points of view, are not of any interest to him whatever, as his sole concern is with the self. Such transcendence of the earth-bound interests and aversions is the basic attribute of the man who has gone beyond the Guṇas. His life embodies a trans-valuation of values. He remains as if indifferent, for he is exclusively contented with the vision of the self that transcends the Guṇas. He is not moved from his stead-fast spirituality by the Guṇas through the desires and aversions they engender. He remains serene and unperturbed seeing that the Guṇas are simply working out other nature. He never yields to the provocations of the Guṇas and does not allow himself to be activated by them. He possesses equanimity of spirit under condition of pleasure and pain. He enjoys the state of being established in his own Ātman. It is for this reason that other pleasures and pains mean nothing to him. To him gold and a lump of clay and all the objects of worldly love and hatred, are of the same value. He is gifted in discrimination between the Puruṣa and Prakṛti. He treats with equality praise and blame, honour and disgrace, friends and foes, for all these pertain to the form in which he is embodied. In truth they have no connection with his inward essence and he steadily dwells on this disconnection.

He renounces all actions that proceed from identification with the body. He who has these features both inner and outer, has gone beyond the realm of the Guṇas.”

So far Śrī Kṛṣṇa expounded the defining characteristics and behaviour of the person who has ascended beyond the binding qualities of Prakṛti. Now He answers the enquiry concerning the road to freedom from them.

He says:

“He who serves me of omnipotent will, of compassion Supreme and who am an ocean of tenderest love towards devotees, with undivided Bhakti goes beyond these Guṇas and attains the eternal perfection characteristic of spirit. This is the right remedy for the evils of the Guṇas, for, *I am indeed the one means for the attainment of surpassing prosperity, of self-realization and the infinite bliss of God-realization.* Surrender to me is the unfailing means of attaining these great goals.” This has been already declared in the seventh chapter. Here it is brought forward and recommended for achieving freedom from the Guṇas. In fact freedom from Māyā spoken of there is the same as the freedom from the Guṇas. This is just a reiteration of the sovereign remedy with all the emphasis that the intervening teachings impart to it.

CHAPTER XV

The last six chapters of the *Gītā*, according to Rāmānuja's commentary, reconsider the metaphysics of nature, the individual soul and God, and the philosophy of Sādhana, both of which are the themes covered by the twelve chapters that have gone before. This reconsideration is for purposes of a clearer determination of principles. On this plan, the thirteenth chapter has discussed the individual self and nature. The fourteenth has carried forward the same matter and has discussed the manner of their association in detail and the one sovereign method of liberating the self from the bondage to matter. The fifteenth deals fully with the supreme reality and elucidates the nature of God. The last three chapters supplement with some necessary and useful clarification the formulation of Sādhana that has been effected in detail in the course of the first two groups of chapters.

Under this scheme, the fifteenth chapter occupies a position of great importance. It gathers together the teachings of the text in chapters seven, nine, ten and eleven, on the nature and glory of the Supreme Being and lays down the philosophy of the *Puruṣottama* with wonderful brevity as well as profundity. It discharges the task of clarification in a masterly style and achieves beauty of utterance worthy of its high theme.

It describes the two-fold glory of God, to be named *Kṣara* and *Akṣara* herein, and how He transcends both these on account of His freedom from all evil and possession of a nature altogether exalted and holy. With this consideration it names Him, *Puruṣottama*.

With a view to introduce the *Akṣara*, which means the emancipated soul, the system of material existence from

which it is emancipated through the weapon of non-attachment, is taken up for presentation. The world in which the bound soul moves from birth to birth in its career of evil and suffering is pictured as the *Aśwattha* tree. its roots are above and its branches hang down-wards. The significance of this is that it is a creation of the creator God, *Chaturmukha*, the highest of created beings and all the other beings fashioned by him are of lower levels of creation. This tree is fairly permanent, for it exists as an unbroken stream of existence, till the rise of enlightenment from which comes non-attachment. Of this tree the *Vedas* are said to be the leaves. Just as a tree grows through leaves, the life in this world is fostered by the desire-prompted action, the manner of whose efficacious performance is prescribed by sections of the *Vedas*. He who knows this tree, is the knower of the *Vedas*, for the *Vedas* in their final import teach the method of cutting down this tree, and a knowledge of what is to be thus destroyed is a necessary preliminary to that final import. Among the branches hanging down, some spread upwards and some spread downwards. They are the various higher and lower kinds of creatures. These branches are nourished by the *Guṇas*, the primary qualities of *Prakṛti*. They are made attractive by tender leaves of the nature of sense-objects. In other words, these stations in the world of creation tempt souls by the prospect of enjoyment they hold forth. The branch of the nature of the world of men, sends forth roots downwards also, in the form of *Karma*. That means that human life specializes in providing scope for the putting forth of fresh *Karma*, which acts as root for the life of transmigration. These new roots originate the different higher and lower re-incarnations. This tree is not understood comprehensively in all its aspects. How this tree comes to an end is not understood. Its beginning is also not understood. That it starts with involvement in the *Guṇas* and that it is cut down by non-attachment to the

Guṇas is not discovered. That this life rests finally on ignorance, on not understanding the distinction between the self and the non-self is not grasped.

This tree, which is deep-rooted as well as many-rooted, must be cut down by the weapon of non-attachment and then the goal, after reaching which there is no return to this career of bondage, must be sought after.

How is attachment and its cause, wrong understanding, which are both beginningless, to be eliminated? The method is specified. It is the same that was prescribed in the seventh chapter for conquering Māyā and prescribed again in the fourteenth chapter for transcending the rule of the Guṇas.

The Supreme One, who is the cause and foundation of all existence, must be approached and to Him the aspirant must surrender himself, for He is the starting point of even this aspect of creation which binds the soul in the meshes of the Guṇa. He must be approached as refuge, for, through such surrender, the ancient devotees also who achieved liberation reached their goal. Such is the ancient tradition concerning liberation.

When devotees surrender thus to the supreme one, they acquire great virtues. They will be free from the delusion of identity with the body. They escape the great fault of attachment to the pleasures born of the Guṇas. They are ever-established in the knowledge of the Ātman. Their desires cease. They are not bound by the duality of pleasure and pain. They comprehend the distinction between the self and non-self. They attain the eternal nature of the self as characterized by boundless knowledge. These who adopt the path of surrender progress thus towards their final goal through the grace of God and the path is also easy and smooth for them. The light of knowledge that belongs to the self inherently is supreme. It is not illumined by the sun, moon and fire. The external and physical lights are mere aids to

remove the obstruction to the communion between the eye and the visual object. This inherent light of knowledge is revealed only by Yoga and the obstruction to its manifestation is the past Karma. The obstruction is removable by the surrender to God and by the consequences of that surrender such as non-attachment. This supreme illumination of the self is a part of God's glory.

The individual self is an eternal part of God and is the Jīva in the world of Jīvas, covered up by the ignorance of the form of beginningless Karma. In the state of such bondage he drags with him the five senses and the mind, which are located in the body. Just as air carries odour from place to place, the Jīva while passing from one body to another carries with him the senses along with the subtle parts of the elements, being their lord. The senses are the organs of hearing, seeing, touch, taste and smell. He presides over these and the mind and through them experiences their respective objects such as sound.

The ignorant do not see him, while he leaves the body or while he lives in the body or while he enjoys the products of the Guṇas, for he is mixed up with the body governed by the Guṇas. But the enlightened see him with the eye of knowledge. His transcendent nature is missed by the ignorant but is clearly discerned by the enlightened. Those who after surrender to God practise the disciplines beginning with Karma-yoga, and whose minds are thus purified, see the Ātman through the eye of contemplation, who though dwelling in the body is fundamentally other than the body in his essential nature. But some, in spite of their endeavour, do not see the Ātman for their minds are not cultured through self-surrender to God. So far the self in its two states, that of freedom and bondage as constituting a glory of God, has been dealt with. Incidental to the treatment of freedom, the realm of bondage has been described through the picture of

a cosmic Aśwatha tree. That the transition from bondage to spiritual liberty is to be accomplished by self-surrender to the Supreme Being has been declared again. While dealing with the self's inherent power of knowledge, it has been named the supreme light, which, it is said, can be lighted up by neither the sun, nor moon nor fire.

Now it is said that the brilliance of even physical light is a part of divine glory. The illumination characteristic of the sun, the moon and fire is also an aspect of God. The specific powers of the other elements also are aspects of God. God enters the earth and through it sustains all creatures on earth. He becomes the nectar-like Soma and nourishes all vegetation. He becomes the energy within the living body and with the aid of the vital breath brings about the assimilation of the four kinds of food.

In reality He dwells in all beings as their inmost soul and maintains their specific powers. It is such immanence which lends substance and power to the beings and it is responsible for speaking of God as the all.

In all beings He dwells in the centre, in the heart, from which spring all thoughts, and all other mental processes. From Him proceed, memory, knowledge whether it arises from the senses, inference, scripture or Yōga, and Apohana, which means either termination of knowledge or ratiocination. He is the subject-matter of all the Vedas. He brings about the fruition of the several modes of worship, which is promised in the Vedas. He is, in fact, the only one who knows the import of the Vedas in its entirety. Whoever interprets the Vedas as signifying any import other than this teaching of God Himself, does not understand them.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa, sets forth the substance of all the Vedas, according to Rāmānuja, in the following words:

"There are two persons in this world, Kṣara and Akṣara. All the living beings are Kṣara. The unvarying one is called

Akṣara. The Highest person is different from both and He is called the supreme soul. He pervades the three worlds and maintains them, He, the undecaying over-Lord. Because I surpass Kṣara and Akṣara, I am celebrated both in the Veda and the Lōka as Puruṣottama.” The significant terms in the passage and the total import are to be interpreted.

By ‘Kṣara’ is to be understood the individual souls caught up in the bonds of matter, which is subject to variation. The singular is used in a generic sense. By ‘Akṣara’, we are to understand, the souls that are emancipated from matter and therefore subsist in their unvarying essential character. The term ‘Akṣara’ is also used in the singular in a generic sense. The bound souls mixed with matter are characterized as perishable on account of the perishable character of their embodiment. The free souls enjoy their eternal and unvarying nature in fullness of manifestation and hence they are characterized as imperishable.

There is the Highest Puruṣa or Person, who is other than these two persons. He is named ‘the Supreme Ātman’ in all the Vedas. By that very designation His difference from the Kṣara Puruṣa and even the Akṣara Puruṣa is made known. How is this difference established? He pervades the three worlds, the world of matter, the world of the finite selves in bondage and the world of liberated selves as their inmost soul and maintains them in existence. Therefore He must be construed as different from them, as they are pervaded and maintained by Him. The further reason for understanding Him as different from them is that He is undecaying and is the Lord. Being undecaying, He must be differentiated from matter which is subject to decay, from bound souls which are mixed up with decaying matter and the liberated souls, which in their previous condition of bondage, were mixed up with decaying matter. Similarly He is the Lord of

these three worlds and hence also He must be understood as different from them.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches that He transcends both the Kṣara and Akṣara. Hence He is celebrated as Puruṣottama, the Highest person, both in the primary scriptures, the Vedas and the 'Lōka', the Smṛtis, which constitute secondary scriptures. Through the Smṛtis, the purport of the Vedas are intuited and hence they are called here the 'Lōka'.

Such is the significance of the passage according to Rāmānuja. It gives utterance to the culminating metaphysical vision of the *Gītā*, which is itself, the distilled essence of the wisdom of the Vedas.

He who understands God thus and does not confound Him with the Kṣara and Akṣara in any way wins His grace greatly. The grace thus won by this understanding is equal to God's grace that would accrue to one if he understood all that was necessary for realizing God and if he practised all modes of worship necessary for realizing Him. The understanding of the transcendent reality of the Puruṣottama is so precious an achievement. Śrī Kṛṣṇa concludes with a tribute to the knowledge of the Puruṣottama.

"This greatest secret has been imparted to you because you are sinless. Whatever intelligence has to be cultivated and whatever duty is to be fulfilled for attaining me, should be taken as cultivated and fulfilled, by one who understands this truth about the Puruṣottama". This understanding of the Puruṣottama praised is the intellectual understanding itself and not the direct vision of the Puruṣottama. The subject-matter is so exalted that even the intellectual apprehension of it and not the intuitive experience, constitutes the acme of spiritual life.

A consolidated statement of the doctrinal gains for Rāmānuja's system from this chapter may be attempted.

- (1) There is no hint in the chapter that the realm of transmigration, full of evil and suffering, represented by the Aśwattha tree is an illusion. It may be ephemeral and insubstantial from the perspective of value but not a single word occurs in the text pronouncing it illusory or unreal.
- (2) Nor is there any indication that the physical world consisting of the elements and so on, is a phenomenal construction not forming a part of ultimate Reality. It is permeated and sustained by the Puruṣottama and every specific part of it owes whatever power or substance it has to the immanence of the Divine. *There is no denial of its being but only a denial of its independent being.* The physical world is an authentic self-revelation of God.
- (3) The Jīva is declared to be an eternal part of God. The justifiability of the application of the concept of whole and part to the relation between God and the individual soul may need discussion. But the actual words of the text are very clear. The Jīva is an eternal part of God. There is no possibility of taking the Jīva as a separate and independent reality nor as wholly identical with God. The *Gītā* seems to favour the view of the Jīva as belonging to God in the intimate and organic way in which the part belongs to the whole. This is a more balanced appraisal of the ontological status of the individual, than what we seem to have in the beginning of thirteenth chapter and the conclusion of fifteenth chapter. While the first passage seems to identify the Kṣetrajña with Īśwara, the second one speaks of Īśwara as 'Anyā', as the 'other'. The present proposition brings together those two statements and assimilates them into a fuller and clearer version of the situation.

- (4) What the Akṣara-Puruṣa means can be settled in view of its classification as a Puruṣa and not any kind of material existence and its being surpassed and transcended by Puruṣottama and therefore not one with Him. *It is spirit and not the supreme spirit. It has a further characteristic that justifies the description of it as imperishable. Though it is finite spirit, it is not of the nature of finite spirits subject to the transmigratory modifications of embodiment. Rāmānuja identifies it with the finite spirit in its pure condition of freedom from transmigratory embodiment.* The Puruṣottama surpasses it and He maintains it from within. He is said to be its Īśwara also. The distinction between the liberated and God and God's immanent maintainence of it are points of capital importance.
- (5) The formulation of the nature of the Puruṣottama in the chapter is most significant. He is Īśwara, He is undecaying in a special sense. He pervades and maintains matter, the bound souls and the liberated souls as their supreme soul. *He is the supreme personality transcending all and holding all within the infinite range of His glory.* He is neither impersonal, not identical with all, nor acosmic.
- (6) While these are the definitive metaphysical teachings of the chapter, it is equally decisive in its prescription for the realization of the highest goal of life, eternal life in God. The Puruṣottama from whom proceeds the entire world of finite realities, must be resorted to in devotional self-surrender for redemption from the prison of Samsāra with its shackles of the Guṇas and the blinding darkness of Māyā.

There is no other way to emancipation. Even the ancients who reached this summit of spiritual progress, adopted only

this great and sure method of advance. The indispensable, unfailing and all-sufficing technique of adopting God Himself as the means for reaching Him, through absolute surrender of one's spiritual burdens and responsibilities to Him in humble and utter faith in His saving power and grace, is announced again in the chapter, thus summing up the practical philosophy of the *Gītā* in its entirety.

CHAPTER XVI

From the thirteenth chapter, to the end of the fifteenth, a critical and decisive restatement of the metaphysical principle has been worked out. The nature of the physical reality, the individual self in its nature as transcending the physical and as characterized by the power of consciousness and the mechanism of the bondage of the self in matter have been elucidated. The nature of the Supreme Spirit, transcending matter and the finite spirits, by virtue of its absolute perfection and its immanent possession of them as its own modes or embodiment has been conclusively set forth.

In the remaining three chapters the reconsideration of the practical teachings of the text is worked out. In the sixteenth chapter with a view to reinforce the whole teaching, the need to abide by the direction of the Śāstra, the body of sacred injunctions, is affirmed and as preliminary to that proposition the distinction between the life of conformity to the Śāstra and that contrary to it is drawn in clear relief. The two types of life, with all their contrasted tendencies, are named, the divine creation and the demoniac creation.

Persons so created as to fulfil the purpose of God have certain tendencies. The life of conformity to Divine purpose, as embodied in sacred injunctions, is called 'Daivī Sampath', the Divine wealth or attainment. The life that runs counter to that purpose, is named Āsūri Sampath, or demoniac attainment. The chapter opens with an enunciation of the leading characteristics of those who are destined for the divine destiny.

First of all comes fearlessness. Fear arises out of an awareness of the existence of the causes that will bring about the destruction of the objects of attachment and the realiza-

tion of the objects of aversion. The absence of such fear is what is named fearlessness or 'Abhaya'. The purity of mind is the next virtue in the context. It is of the nature of freedom from Rajas and Tamas. Steadfast adherence to the discrimination between the pure self and the realm of non-self is the quality named 'stabilization in Jñāna-yōga'. The giving away of one's wealth earned through right means to right persons is charity or 'Dāna'. 'Dama' is the withdrawal of the mind from sense-objects. 'Yajña' is performance of the five-fold duties of life in the spirit of dedication to God. 'Swādhyāya' is the study of the Veda, with the conviction that it reveals the glorious nature of God and the mode of His worship. 'Tapas' is penance of the prescribed kinds for purposes of gaining fitness to worship God. 'Ārjava' is sincerity, consisting of the oneness of thought, word and deeds in one's dealings with others. 'Ahimsa' is abstaining from injury to others. 'Satya' is communication by words of what one knows for certain and what is conducive to the good of others. 'Akrodha' is the absence in oneself of the mental condition, which, if allowed free play, would bring about injury to others. 'Tyāga', is renunciation of everything that is contrary to one's ultimate good. 'Śānti' is the suppression of the senses in their propensity to seek their objects. 'Apaisuna' means the prohibition in oneself of speech that may bring evil to others. 'Dayā' means compassion which lies in one's incapacity to stand the suffering of others. Detachment towards sense-objects is what the next virtue named Aloluptva' or 'Alolutva' means. 'Mārdava' means softness, absence of harshness, which conduces towards fitness for the company of the good. The sense of shame in doing what is unworthy is 'Hṛee'. Absence of perturbation when confronted with tempting objects is 'Achapala'. 'Tejas' is the quality by virtue of which one cannot be put down or eclipsed by the wicked. 'Kṣama' is the freedom from all antagonistic attitude

towards others, even when they cause injury to oneself. 'Dhṛti' is the self-possession to do one's duty even under conditions of greatest calamity. Purity or 'soucha' is the fitness of the mind and the senses as specified in the scriptures for performance of holy deeds. 'Adroha' is non-interference with the freedom of others. 'Nātimānita' is freedom from misplaced pride. These are the virtues that are found in one, who is created for the fulfilment of the divine scheme of life.

Those who incline towards the Āsuric mode of life are endowed differently. They perform deeds of righteousness for gaining reputation for righteousness. They are elated by the pleasures of sense-life and lose the sense of discrimination between right and wrong. They are puffed up with pride, totally out of harmony with their birth and learning. They are filled with anger and its outcome is injury to fellow-creatures. They are given to harshness of bearing towards others, which naturally hurts the susceptibilities of the good. They are ignorant of the distinctions between the highest reality and the lower orders of being and also of that between good and evil. Such is the nature of men born for the demoniac mode of life.

Between these two trends of life, the divine tendency leads to liberation and the eventual attainment of God. The demoniac leads to spiritual degradation. Seeing Arjuna anxious concerning his own nature, apprehending that he might belong to the Āsuric side of creation, Śrī Kṛṣṇa hastens to assure him that he has been endowed with the God-ward disposition.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa states the general purport of the chapter. In this world of mortals wherein creatures have to work out their destinies, the beings are divided at their very birth into these two kinds, on the basis of their ethical and spiritual performances in the past lives. They are endowed with the contrasted dispositions, that will incline them towards the

divine or demoniac modes of life. The god-ward life has been delineated fairly extensively throughout the text, for, in reality, the treatment of Karma-yōga, Jñāna-yōga and Bhakti is just an exposition of the pathway of that life. The other mode of life remains to be described. To that task the rest of the chapter is devoted.

The persons with the Āsuric temperament do not understand the righteous conduct that leads to worldly happiness and that which paves the way for the final emancipation. They are bereft of the purity in which lies fitness for devotion to the higher pursuits of life. The mode of life from which such purity of life emerges is also alien to them. Truth understood as speech according to one's actual knowledge and conducing to the welfare of others does not characterize them.

In their conception the universe is not ensouled by Brahman, the ultimate reality. For them, it is not established in it; it is without any divine control whatever; and all creatures are brought about merely by the process of reproduction. Resting on this philosophy, they do not distinguish between their inner spiritual nature and the material embodiment. They are thus of little intelligence. Naturally they engage themselves in destructive activities. Pursuing desires that cannot be fulfilled, puffed up with pride, spiritual as well as secular, governed by delusion, appropriating unrighteous gains and observing unholy penances, they live their lives. They forget the imminence of death and plan out projects which would take for their realization the entire future of the world; they conceive of the satisfaction of earthly desires as the supreme end of life and are perfectly convinced about it. They are bound by hundreds of desires and are devoted exclusively to their satisfaction and the consequent pugnacities. They endeavour after wealth in immoral ways for the gratification of their low wants.

As they do not recognize the divine governance of the world, they credit themselves with everything good that may befall them. They think and proclaim: "I have secured this; I will gain the other objective also; this wealth I have; that wealth also will accrue to me. I have killed this enemy; I will destroy the others also. I am the lord of my self in every way and in fact I am ruling over others also. I enjoy the pleasures of life through my own powers. I am a successful man by myself. I am mighty and happy. I am respectable, and great by birth; and who else is equal to me? I will practise religion and charity, all through my own inherent ability. I enjoy all these glories through my unaided and intrinsic worth and prowess". Such is their ignorance and delusion. They are distracted and torn asunder by a multitude of plans. They are enmeshed in webs of delusion. They hold fast to the satisfaction of their desires. When they die, in the midst of their mad and deluded lives, they descend to hell. They are held in high esteem by themselves. They arrogate to themselves perfection and are intoxicated with wealth and pride. When they worship gods, they do so for the sake of fame and that not in accordance with the proper rules of religion. Possessed of egotism, might, conceit, desire, and pugnacity, they truly hate the God-head dwelling within themselves and all other creatures. They invent reasons for disproving the existence of God.

Such worst specimens of the human species, given to hatred of God and cruelty to His creatures are cast by Him into Āsuric births and therein are again propelled towards conduct leading to such births in future also. Being so born, those deluded souls, fail again to turn God-ward and go down into more heinous incarnations.

The essence of the Āsuric mode of life, which leads to spiritual self-ruination, is brought out now.

Desire, born of the delusion of identity with the body,

anger, born of the frustration of such desire and greed for the accumulation of the material means for the gratification of such desires are the three doors of hell. That way lies the ruination of the spirit in man. Hence these three should be shunned from a distance. He who is free from these doors of darkness, pursues the real good of his self. That way he attains God, the supreme goal of life.

He who gives up the injunctions of the sacred scriptures and follows his own ill-conceived desires, attains nothing, gains no happiness and misses the supreme end of life. In conclusion, Arjuna is exhorted to follow the Śāstra for distinguishing between right and wrong and pursue what has been declared to be right in the Śāstra.

The purport of the chapter is simple and serves a very necessary purpose. Two ways of life are open to man, that of evil and the one that leads to God. The second one has been dealt with already in several contexts and in this chapter also its main principles are enunciated.

The evil way has an intellectual as well a practical content. Intellectually it stands for the denial of the Ātman in man and Brahman as the source and soul of the universe. In practical life it stands for the life of earth-bound desires and all that follows from the slavery to desires. Arjuna is told in words of assurance that he belongs by disposition to the right way. He is exhorted to develop himself in that direction further by scrupulously adhering to the holy precepts of the Śāstra, which map out the pathway to God and embody His words of guidance to mankind. The final import of the chapter may be summed up as the affirmation of the incomparable value of conformity to the Śāstra, which expounds the supreme goal as well as the supreme way of life. That teaching serves as a preamble to the entire effort after the higher life, the working out of which life in its fulness constitutes the theme of the *Gītā* as a whole.

CHAPTER XVII

According to Rāmānuja's commentary, the preceding chapter distinguished between the two contrasted modes of life, one leading to spiritual degradation and the other culminating in the attainment of God. The God-ward direction of life is defined at the conclusion of the chapter as active conformity to the wisdom of the Śāstra. The Śāstra represents the body of knowledge concerning the supreme goal of life and the means towards its realization. It is also possible that one is not inclined towards the highest goal but seeks the lesser purposes of life. Even in that case, the Śāstra is of indispensable value, for it lays down the ways to be pursued for achieving those purposes also. Thus from Śāstra we obtain the wisdom concerning the proper goal of human life and also the right ways to be adopted for realizing all the goals of life. It embodies the objective laws governing the realization of the values of life of all scales and the objective determination of the right hierarchy of values also. It is not to be misconstrued that the Śāstra is arbitrary or dogmatic in its pronouncements and excludes reason altogether. In the first place the Śāstra addresses itself to all types of men, and it is left to the seeker to discriminate the portion of the śāstra that is relevant to his spiritual standing and aspiration. Secondly the vedāntic attitude to the Śāstra is such that it enjoins the full utilization of reason in the interpretation of the Śāstra and also in the vindication of its truth-claim in terms of reason in the context of opposition from points of view not acknowledging the authority of Śāstra. Logical validation of the Śāstra is an essential requirement. Hence arose the need for the Brahma-Sūtra.

The account of the two ways of life and the concluding emphasis on the Śāstras evokes a natural question on the part of Arjuna. “Supposing a person practises religion with great earnestness and faith in his own way and does not follow the rules of the Śāstra, how is he to be judged? Is his devotion to be classified as Sāttwic, Rājasiḥ or Tāmasic?” Devotion to religion that is deep but does not abide by the regulations of the scriptures, calls for a proper estimate. The question is whether there are laws, objective and inexorable, in spiritual life also. Are not keenness of faith and intensity of devotion all-sufficing for religious progress?

Śrī Kṛṣṇa does not offer a straight answer, for the question does not admit of an answer without some preliminary clarification. Earnest faith is all-important and it constitutes, as it were, the essence of man. But the quality of faith depends upon the quality of mind. Mind is swayed by the three Guṇas. Hence there are three levels of faith depending upon the predominance of one of the Guṇa.

The word used in both the question and the answer is ‘Śraddha’, which has been rendered as ‘earnest faith’. Rāmānuja explains the word as meaning eagerness for endeavour proceeding from faith. It is neither a passive assent nor mere impetuosity. It is energetic effort founded on indomitable faith.

Now this quality of Śraddhā is itself classifiable into three kinds. Śraddhā proceeding from Sattva is enlightened and induces worship of elevated and holy powers. Śraddhā of the nature of Rajas, causes the practice of the cult of Yakṣas and Rakṣasas. Tāmasic Śraddhā is responsible for the worship of ghosts and evil spirits.

With this clarification the question can be faced properly. Those who discard the knowledge inculcated in the Śāstra, and practise hard austerities, with pride and egotism, carried away by their own desires, passions and strength,

foolishly mortifying their bodies and injuring the divine spiritual principle in themselves, are to be understood as moved by Āsuric resolve. In other words, the Śraddhā that is not Sāttwic and for that very reason is unilluminated by the wisdom of the Śāstra, is Āsuric in the extreme.

The chapter proceeds next to classify food, sacrifice, penance and charity into three kinds in accordance with the Guṇas.

That food which conduces to longevity, intellectual alertness, strength, health, happiness and satisfaction and is sweet, mixed suitably with oil or ghee, substantial and pleasing to look at, is liked by men characterized by Sattwa.

What is bitter, sour, over-salted, very hot, very pungent, what dries up the eater and causes burning sensation, is food that is relished by the men of Rajas.

What is stale, has lost its original taste, has acquired a different taste by lapse of time, smells bad, has remained over after being partaken by others and is not associated with any worship, is the food that men of Tamas enjoy.

That sacrifice is Sāttwic, which is performed without a desire for any fruits, in accordance with scriptural injunctions and by one who contemplates it as his duty. That which is performed with a desire for its fruits, and for the sake of religious fame, is Rājasic. That which is bereft of authority, which uses offerings not sanctioned in scripture, in which the right hymns to Gods are not recited, which is not backed by faith and is devoid of the enjoined gifts is said to be Tāmasic.

Tapas or penance is three-fold, that of the body, speech and mind.

The worship of gods, Brahmins and preceptors and enlightened ones, bodily purity, sincerity of conduct, absence of lustful attitude towards women and non-injury to creatures constitute bodily penance.

Speech that does not wound, is true and conducive to the happiness and welfare of others and also the recitation of the scriptures, constitute the penance of speech.

Tranquillity of mind, the habitual direction of thought towards the good of others, control of speech by the mind, the concentration of the mind on the object chosen for contemplation, and the withdrawal of mind from thoughts not connected with the Ātman, these together constitute the penance of the mind.

There are three grades of penance according to the Guṇas. This three-fold penance practised with great earnestness and faith, with the idea that it is worship of the Supreme Being and with no thoughts of any reward is penance of the Sāttwic variety. That which is performed for the sake of winning the good opinion of others, their praise and their veneration and with a view to obtain some reward is penance of the Rājasic kind. Its reward cannot be enjoyed in rest for there is always the fear of losing it. It is also perishable. That penance, which is undertaken through lack of correct understanding, and involves self-mortification and the suffering of others also, is penance of the Tāmasic type.

Charity that is done motivated solely by the idea of duty, but not in return for favours received and at the proper time, place and to the proper person is named Sattwic Dāna or charity. Giving of gifts in return for favours received or with the motive of gaining some return and that not gifts specially valuable, is charity of the Rājasic variety. Charity at the wrong time and place to wrong persons without due respect and in a humiliating manner is charity of the Tāmasic kind.

So far the chapter carried forward in a way the thought of the previous chapter. The Āsuric and Daivi modes of life were fully portrayed and the distinctive characteristic of the latter was said to lie in its conformity to the Vedic scripture.

Then the question was raised about the status of religious life full of earnest faith but in non-conformity to the scriptural commandments. In answer a classification of faith itself was given and it was shown that faith of the highest kind was Sāttwic and hence was guided by the illumination provided by the Śāstra. The lowest level of faith is Tāmasic in the extreme and pursues ways contrary to the regulations of the Śāstra. In continuation of the classification of faith on the basis of the three Guṇas, a similar classification of foods, sacrifices, penances and charity was set forth.

Now the chapter concludes by introducing a formula, that is said to go with everything Vedic. In consequence, the Vedic utterances, the followers of the Vedas and the rites and duties in accordance with the Vedas are said to involve the use of this formula. The formula, has significance which is at once ritualistic, symbolic and mystic. The formula is 'Aum Tat Sad'. It consists of three words.

The first one is 'Aum'. It is of universal application in everything Vedic. The followers of the Vedas must utter it, it must be uttered as part of all Vedic recitation and it must be used while performing all acts enjoined by the Vedas. Whether the Vedic religion practised is of the ritualistic type aiming at happiness or the enlightened one aiming at liberation, the use of this expression is imperative. Its meaning is not elucidated here. Its general import is taken for granted. It signifies the Supreme Reality and the devotee must bear in mind that his life is one of continual dedication to that all-comprehending principle. Even as Brahman is the Supreme Principle in existence, it should be accorded the central place in life. Such is the significance of the universal employment of this sacred expression. In the full interpretation of Aum, it represents the supreme act of self-surrender to God. On that interpretation its utilization by all the followers of the Vedas in all their recitation of the sacred hymns and in all

their performance of sacred acts, is of vital spiritual significance. It converts life into a perpetual adoration.

The next expression is 'Tat'. It signifies Brahman. It is specifically to be used by the aspirants after liberation. Contemplating Brahman and surrendering the fruits of one's deeds to Him, one should live the spiritual life, and such a life would lead him to final freedom. The use of the expression symbolizes both the renunciation of the fruits of action and the march through such a life to Brahman, the ultimate goal.

The third word of the formula is 'Sat'. It signifies both what exists and what is good, auspicious or beneficial. The latter import is the one intended here. 'Sat' therefore means 'good' here and it implies devotion to deeds of goodness, such as sacrifice, penance and charity. The expression must be used while engaged in acts of righteousness, which are such on the authority of the Vedas. The good deeds may be performed for purposes of securing welfare, by the operation of the law of Karma. The application of 'Sat' is in connection with such deeds. While 'Tat' applies only to deeds of those who are seeking liberation, the term 'Sat' applies to the others, who just seek the good things of life through adherence to the righteous path of life.

'Aum' enters into the whole of Vedic life, whether one seeks mere welfare or emancipation. 'Tat' characterizes exclusively the life of the aspirant after liberation. 'Sat' marks and defines the life of goodness, not yet hitched to the ideal of liberation. In other words, life in conformity with the Vedas consists of the consciousness of God in all the doings of life. Within the Vedic life itself there is a lower level of mere goodness which is pursuit of welfare following from goodness. There is a higher level of complete detachment from personal concern and a total seeking of God as an end in itself. The formula enunciated covers both these aspects

of the life in conformity to the Vedas. Here we touch the climax of the characterization of 'Daivi Sampath'.

The drift of the chapter might seem to minimise the importance of 'Śraddhā' and exalt the role of conformity to the Śāstra. Personal fervour of faith and devotion do not appear to have received their due. This impression is corrected in the last verse.

Inspite of utmost conformity to the rules of the Śāstra, sacrifice, penance and charity, if they are not done with fiery Śraddha, they are not of any avail, either on the plane of mere goodness or on the plane of the pursuit of liberation. The final taching of the chapter, as pointed out by Vedānta Deśika, is the affirmation of the equal importance of Śraddha and Śāstra.

CHAPTER XVIII

The eighteenth chapter constitutes a resumé, a completion and a fitting conclusion of the whole work. Naturally it covers a wide range of themes constituting the fundamental argument as it has progressed so far and carries it forward to the culminating message.

According to Rāmānuja's introduction to the chapter, it comprises of the following topics.

- (1) The elucidation of the concepts of Thyāga and Sannyāsa.
- (2) The analysis of the factors that are involved in all action with a view to show the exact role of the individual self in the causation of action.
- (3) A three-fold classification on the basis of the three Guṇas of certain modes and characteristics of life with a view to advocate the desirability of the Sāttwic type of life.
- (4) A restatement of the pathway of Karma-yoga and the progress of the soul therefrom.
- (5) The final essence of the entire teaching enshrined in the work.

Arjuna has come across the concepts of 'Thyāga' or renunciation and Sannyāsa or asceticism in the course of the work and in Vedāntic literature in general. He wants to know the precise determination of their respective meanings. Are they different in their imports? If so, how are they to be understood and what are their distinguishing meanings? If they signify the same principle, a clear enunciation of the principle is called for.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa eventually teaches the unity of import in respect of Thyāga and Sannyāsa, but as a preliminary to that definitive formulation, he relates the divergent views prevailing about them. Some scholars opine that Sannyāsa is the renunciation of actions, which are prescribed in the Śāstras for those who desire certain personal ends. Others again hold that Thyāga is the renunciation of the fruits of all the three kinds of prescribed actions, those that are unconditionally obligatory, those that are obligatory under certain conditions and those that promote the attainment of certain desired objects. Some hold that all actions are to be shunned even as evil propensities are. Some others protest that actions such as sacrifice, charity and penance are not to be given up.

The truth of the matter, Śrī Kṛṣṇa goes on to assert, is this: Thyāga is three-fold. Actions such as sacrifice, charity and penance are not to be renounced, for they effect purification of mind necessary for contemplatives. They are to be performed with the three-fold renunciation of the sense of being the agent of action, of attachment to the action as one's own and of hankering for the fruits of the action. The obligatory actions are not to be given up. Renunciation of them through the delusion that they bind the soul, when in fact they are conducive to illumination through purification, is renunciation of the Tāmasic type. He who renounces action on account of the ordeal of effort it involves and through fear of physical suffering, is performing renunciation of the Rājasic type and hence he will not reap the fruits of renunciation. The performance of what is obligatory through the consciousness of it as duty with no desire to its fruits and no attachment to action as one's own as instrumental to personal advantage, is renunciation of the Sāttwic type.

In this exposition of Thyāga and Sannyāsa, a fundamental principle gets formulated. The two concepts no doubt mean the same thing, but that meaning is not the discarding

of any action. A refusal to act may be due to either delusion or the fear of the hardships of the pathway of works. Real renunciation does not involve the negation of activity. It is full involvement or commitment to fullness of activity with the total eradication of the ego-centric attitude as expressed in the arrogant sense of doer-ship, the attachment to action on personal grounds and the expectation of personal rewards. Renunciation belongs to the inner world of consciousness behind action and does not signify the outer non-performance of action. It is freedom from self and not freedom from action. The person who has accomplished this highest type of renunciation is established in the true understanding of reality and hence is neutral in relation to actions bringing about personal rewards and personal sufferings. He transcends all self-centred valuations of actions. There is no possibility of a living being discarding all actions. In reality renunciation is only this three-fold renunciation in spirit as explained and not the non-engagement in every mode of activity.

The law of Karma operates in the case of persons devoid of renunciation. Good deeds lead to happy circumstances of life and bad ones lead to misery only when the inner detachment of outlook is not there. If this all-important factor is operative, the causal law of Karma stands nullified. It is not action that produces binding effects, but the character of the drive behind the action.

So far the general principle of renunciation has been set forth. One of the elements that go into the comprehensive spirit of renunciation is the conviction that the doer of all actions is God Himself. With a view to inculcate that thought an analysis of the factors involved in all actions is outlined here. In the first place the body is the seat of all active exertion. Secondly the individual self embodied in the body is also a factor. The third factor consists of the organs of

action along with the Manas. The fourth factor is the vital breath in its several forms pervading and sustaining the body as a living organism. The fifth and the most dominant factor is the Supreme Spirit dwelling in all these. These five factors are involved in all actions, right and wrong, and actions that are physical, vocal and mental. Such being the account of the total situation of action, to take oneself individually as the sole and self-sufficient doer or agent of action is to commit a great blunder.

Here the great problem of human freedom and Divine Omnipotence naturally claims discussion. The all-controlling role of God must be fully recognized. He provides the individual with the body, the organs and the vital force and endows them with the requisite capacities. The individual also is sustained by Him and owes to Him his power of initiative, and creative self-exertion. Thus equipped with the physical aids of action and the inner moral freedom, he exercises his spontaneous powers of action. His moral responsibility stands unimpaired and his ultimate dependence on the Supreme for such inner powers as well as the physical factors remains a fundamental metaphysical fact. God is all in all and man is also free. The paradox gets resolved by the paramount truth that Divine Omnipotence is itself responsible for the maintainance and exercise of human freedom. Man is morally free but that very prerogative and unique power he owes to the controlling immanence of God. Dependence on other factors of the situation and especially on God in a very intimate and fundamental manner does not take away the individual's moral responsibility. Man makes a difference to the situation, though he draws from God that power for making a difference. Such is the substance of Rāmānuja's explanation of individual freedom and Divine Omnipotence.

The effect of this enlightenment with regard to the factors involved in action is to bring into every action the

understanding that God is the fundamental active principle and that He executes actions through the individual self and the physical accessories that belong to Him as parts of His own actuality. This consciousness of the divine agency in all action is one of the elements in the spirit of renunciation. The other two follow naturally and the action as well as the fruits of action are looked upon as belonging to God only. He who attains this three-fold ideal of self-effacement, may do any action, but it will not fetter him in any way. He transcends the realm of Kārmic retribution.

All this, the ideal aspect of Karma-yoga, is to be achieved through the development of Sattwa. In order to indicate the desirability of Sattwa, the classification of the forces involved in action on the basis of the three qualities of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas is taken up for exposition.

The injunction to sacred action reveals the knowledge concerning action, the nature of action and the person comprehending action. The action itself is said to consist of the three factors, the materials required, the actual performance and the person who performs the prescribed action. Amidst these elements that go into the injunction to action and action itself Śrī Kṛṣṇa undertakes to exhibit three types of knowledge, action and the doer of actions based upon the three Guṇas of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas.

That knowledge is of the Sāttwic order by which one discerns the fundamental unity of the nature of all selves, in spite of their outer diversities of embodiment. The Rājasic knowledge takes the diversity of creatures as ultimate. In Tāmasic knowledge also the diversity is taken as ultimate and there is concentration on one course of action as if it is all important, when in fact it is ill-conceived, bereft of reason and leads to trivial results.

That action is Sāttwic, which is categorically obligatory, which is done without attachment, is not actuated by love of

fame or dislike of public disapprobation, and which is performed by one who does not seek its fruits. That which is done by one who hankers after rewards and is full of the ego and which involves lot of painful effort is Rājasic. That which is performed by one who does not recognize the ultimate efficient causality of God and is done without due consideration of the loss and violence involved in it and also without examining one's own ability to accomplish it, is Tāmasic action.

That agent or doer is Sāttwic who is free from attachment and pride, who is full of perseverance and enthusiasm and who remains the same under conditions of success as well as failure. One who seeks fame, desires the fruits of his action, is miserly, takes work from others even at the cost of injury to them, is impure in body and mind and exults in success and laments defeat, is the rājasic type of agent. One who is unfit for holy works, is ignorant, is given to inactivity, indulges in evil deeds, is deceptive, is dull in pursuing what he has undertaken, is given to extreme despondency and plans for long-range injury to others is the agent of the Tāmasic kind.

The classification of knowledge, action and the doer of action is thus completed. Now a similar classification of two factors vital for understanding all reality and for realizing all values is introduced. These factors are Dhṛti or perseverance and Buddhi or determining intellect. The first signifies persistence of effort, the volitional aspect of human nature and the second constitutes the intellectual power of discernment and judgment.

The Sāttwic Buddhi is that by which one discriminates the virtues that lead to welfare and liberation, the actions that are morally obligatory and those that are evil, the appropriate objects of moral fear and courage, and lastly the nature of human bondage and emancipation therefrom. The

Rājasic Buddhi is that which fails to comprehend the afore-said virtues and actions, in their right nature. The Buddhi that is enveloped by the quality of Tamas, conceives Dharma as Adharma, the real as unreal, and the supreme reality as an inferior entity and vice-versa. Its nature consists of such contrary apprehension in all cases.

That Dhṛti or perseverance is of the highest Sāttwic variety, by which one maintains the activities of the mind, the vital force and the sense-organs in the single direction of achieving unswerving contemplation of God. That by which a person persists in using his mental, vital and sensory powers for securing the lower objectives of Dharma, Artha and Kāma, with excessive attachment, is Dhṛti of the Rājasic kind. That Dhṛiti by virtue of which one perseveringly exerts his mental, vital and sensory powers for attaining objects that bring him sleep, self-forgetfulness through sense-enjoyment, fear, sorrow and dejection and by virtue of which the obstinate fool does not change his ways, is Dhṛti of the Tāmasic kind.

All these, all knowing and doing aim at happiness. Happiness is the supreme end of all endeavour. Hence three kinds of happiness are also to be distinguished.

That happiness which becomes increasingly enjoyable through continuous experience and which puts an end to the sufferings of human bondage, is Sāttwic. To explain: at the commencement of contemplation, it appears extremely undesirable like poison; as contemplation matures it becomes a source of greatest happiness like nectar. It results from the intellect being exclusively established in the inner transcendent self. This happiness of spiritual contemplation is the highest Sāttwic happiness. That happiness which arises out of the conjunction of the senses and their objects and which seems to be like nectar to start with but becomes extremely painful and undesirable like poison at the end, as the pains by reliev-

ing which it acquired the appearance of happiness subside, is happiness of the rājasic kind. That happiness which both at the beginning and end causes delusion and is born of slumber, inertia and inadvertance is of the tāmasic kind.

Thus persons seeking emancipation must put down Rajas and Tamas, and cultivate only Sattwa.

There is no being either on earth or even in heaven among the gods which is free from these three qualities born of Prakṛti.

Now is the opportunity for stating the duties and occupations of the four castes flowing from the distribution of the Guṇas in accordance with their respective natures. From that statement, the discourse goes on to affirm the nature of devotion to one's own duties in the spirit of worship, in case one seeks liberation through them and the fruition of such devotion to duty in the attainment of God.

The duties of Brāhmaṇās, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śudras have been divided by the Śāstras along with their qualities that are set up by their natures, which are the resultants of their past deeds.

The deeds of the past determine the present dispositions of men. These dispositions bring about the relative potencies of the Guṇas in each case. The Brāhmaṇa has Sattwa dominating over Rajas and Tamas. The Kṣatriya has Rajas in predominance and the other two stand suppressed. In the Vaiśya Rajas and Sattwa are subdued and Tamas is slightly dominant. In the Sudra Tamas is very dominant and the other two are overpowered. The Śāstras properly lay down these qualitative demarcations and formulate the corresponding obligations and occupations of the four groups of men.

The duties pertaining to the Brāhmaṇa following from his nature are enumerated as follows: The first is the control of external sense-organs. The second is control of the mind. Third comes penance. The fourth virtue is purity that confers

fitness for further holy deeds. Forgiveness is the fifth virtue. Straight-forwardness or sincerity is the sixth requisite. Knowledge consisting of the understanding the Highest and lower realities is the seventh virtue. Discriminative knowledge as the understanding of the distinctive characteristics of the Supreme Being is the eighth virtue for the Brāhmaṇa. The last one is Āstikya which may be roughly translated as faith. It signifies for Rāmānuja the determined affirmation of the truth of the entire import of the Vedas, unshakable by any counter-force. It is accepting as absolutely true the teaching of the Vedas concerning the Supreme One, the modes of His worship and the fulfilment of life following therefrom. The duties following from the nature of the Kṣatriya are (1) the power of fearless entry into combat, (2) the impossibility of being eclipsed or overpowered (3) the stamina to persevere in the course of action undertaken in spite of odds (4) competence (5) continuance in battle even when there is certainty of one's own death (6) liberality (7) and leadership.

Agriculture, rearing of cattle and trade are the duties pertaining to the Vaiśya following his nature. The service of the three other castes is the duty of the Śūdra proceeding from his nature.

This account of the four castes receives from Rāmānuja some comments:

- (1) The virtues prescribed for the Brāhmaṇas are necessary for all those who seek the highest end of life, the emancipation of spirit.
- (2) They are easy of attainment for the Brāhmaṇa and hence they are mentioned in relation to him. But they are hard of attainment for the others and hence are not prescribed for them.
- (3) The common duties of the three higher castes are sacrifice, study of scriptures and charity.

- (4) Along with these virtues, the occupations of the castes may also be mentioned and for Rāmānuja, they are also meant here.
- (a) The Brāhmaṇa's occupation consists of priesthood in sacrifice, teaching and receiving of religious gifts.
 - (b) The Kṣatriya's occupation is protection of peoples.
 - (c) The occupation of the Vaiśya are agriculture, maintenance of herds of cattle and trade. They have also been mentioned as his specific duties.
 - (d) In the same way the duty and profession of the Śūdra are the same, namely, the service of the other castes.

A short review of the caste-system as referred to in the *Gītā* in the light of Rāmānuja's commentary may not be out of place here. There are three references. The first reference in the fourth chapter is taken by Rāmānuja as not referring to caste in particular but to creation as a whole. The second reference occurs in the ninth chapter. There the point is that even those who belong to social positions conventionally held lower are competent to reach the highest goal, if they resort to the pathway of Bhakti. This reference in the eighteenth chapter is the only direct one. It occurs just after dealing with the classification of several items pertaining to life on the basis of the Guṇas. It makes clear that the Guṇas are variously distributed among men and this variation is due to past deeds. The statement does not stop with this description but goes on to prescribe the corresponding obligations of the four divisions of society. The natural expectation is that we should have here a clear enunciation of duties common to all castes and then their specific duties. Similarly their different occupations should also be mentioned.

But what we have here does not meet this expectation.

- (1) To the Brāhmaṇa, are prescribed duties that are more or less universal.
- (2) His specific duties and occupation are not mentioned.
- (3) The specific virtues of an ideal Kṣatriya are enunciated but his occupation is not mentioned.
- (4) The occupations of the Vaiśya and Śudra are mentioned and they are obviously identified with their obligations.
- (5) The duties traditionally prescribed for the three upper castes are also not laid down. Hence the account of the caste-system here is very incomplete.

The aim of the reference seems simply to be two-fold:

- (1) That men are also classifiable on the basis of the three qualities and that
- (2) In view of this classification the duties attaching to them also differ.

From this conception of specific duties a natural transition to a consideration of Karma-yoga in the manner of a conclusion is effected. Inculcation of Karma-yoga rather than a clear, full and rigid presentation of the scheme of castes is certainly the purport of the text.

Man attains the highest goal of life by a devoted fulfilment of the duties that specifically pertain to his station in life. Through them, if he worships the Supreme Deity, the source of all being and the Omnipresent Reality, he reaches the final perfection of his life.

Karma-yoga is the natural avocation of a man embodied in the world of matter. Hence it is superior to Jñāna-yoga, even if one can perform the latter well sometimes. The general principle of the preferability of one's own duty to

that of others, however attractive they may appear, is applied here to Karma-yoga as a whole and it is upheld as against Jñāna-yoga. By abiding by what naturally belongs to one's situation in life as a matter of moral obligation, one runs no risk of lapse.

The burden of the third chapter is restated. Karma-yoga even if it involves the pain of effort should not be abandoned even in case of fitness for Jñāna-yoga. As a matter of fact, both Karma-yoga and Jñāna-yoga involve pain of effort. Karma-yoga is easy for the man enmeshed in matter and it contains no risks. But Jñāna-yoga is difficult and is not free from risks.

He who, is free from the desire for fruits and other personal considerations, has subjugated the mind, contemplating God as the power behind all action, has given up attachment to the ego-centred performance of actions and is established in activity with Sannyāsa elucidated herein as one with the three-fold renunciation, attains the supreme goal of contemplativeness which is the aim of even Jñāna-yoga. The contemplativeness in its perfection involves the complete cessation of all sense-activities and hence it is named here Naiṣkarmya.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

“Know from me briefly how a man who has achieved this contemplativeness attains Brahman, which is the final goal of the devoted practice of contemplation.

“One, having his intelligence focused on the real nature of the self, controlling the mind through determined effort, keeping away from sense-objects, vanquishing desire and aversion towards them, keeping in a place free from obstacles to contemplation, practising moderation in food, directing the body, speech and mind towards the ideal of contemplation, practising contemplation, thus equipped, continuously and till the very end, developing dispassion towards all other objects through a discernment of their defects, giving up identifica-

tion of the self with the non-self, the powerful tendencies augmenting that identification, and the pride, passion, anger and covetousness following from it, bereft of the sense of ownership in relation to what do not belong to him, and with all his happiness centred in the realization of the self attains freedom from all bondage and experiences the self in its authentic nature directly (Becomes Brahman)".

This condensed account of the contemplative life calls for three remarks.

- (1) That life is itself a fruition and fulfilment of Karma-yoga, which latter in the context is described as Swadharma.
- (2) It comprises within itself the entire process of Yoga, detailed in many of the earlier chapters, particularly in the course of the first group of six chapters.
- (3) Through it one is said to become Brahman. But this 'becoming Brahman' is not to be taken literally, for the text goes on to speak of the further progress of one who has 'become Brahman', implying thereby that it is a stage, although a very significant stage, on the way to the ultimate ideal and not that ideal itself. To render the statement intelligible the term 'Brahman' has been interpreted as meaning not the Supreme Reality but the essential spiritual principle in the individual being. Either the term 'Brahman' or the term 'Bhoota' (become) must be understood in an unusual and less ultimate sense in order to render the subsequent account of the person who has 'become Brahman' go with this statement consistently and intelligibly. A mechanical understanding of it on Advaitic lines will not do.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa goes on to trace the further progress of the individual who has 'become Brahman.'

Rāmānuja interprets the status attained as coming into possession of one's own nature, as consisting of the infinite power of knowledge and complete subservience to God. The mutual connection of these two characteristics must be clearly grasped. Knowledge finds its fulfilment in the apprehension of God. As knowing is the principal power of the soul, its fulfilment in that apprehension passes on into joy, for joy is nothing but the fullest exercise of the intrinsic powers of the conscious individual. This is the logic of the dictum that the knowledge of the infinite is of the nature of joy. Such a joyous contemplation of the Supreme Spirit is what is meant by the 'love' of God. Love in its heights transmutes the self-asserting ego into a self-surrendering devotee, for the measure of self-surrender incorporated in love is the test of its quality. True love is object-centred and seeks the enhancement of the glory of the object. For that purpose it offers the self to the object for its glorification. Hence the subservience and self-surrender of the subject in relation to the object in love.

When the individual intuits his intrinsic nature as the fruition of the contemplative life, he intuits himself as a centre of knowledge and as a factor deriving value in proportion to his self-dedication to God.

Such an individual is free from the mental defilements of the mundane life, he neither laments earthly losses nor hankers after earthly gains and regards with equal disdain all values and objects other than the supreme object of his devotion. He develops *Parā Bhakti*, supreme devotion to God. Through that devotion he comprehends truly God, as to what He is in His essential nature and the full expanse of His attributes and glories. Having thus comprehended Him truly, he then, through the same means of supreme devotion, attains perfect union with Him.

It is this way that the spiritual progress starting from the

disinterested fulfilment of the unconditional obligations of work and developing through self-intuition culminates in supreme devotion and brings the individual to the fullness of God-realization.

Similar is the fruition of even Kāmya-karma, action prescribed in the scriptures for attaining certain lower advantages of life, if only the same spirit of dedication and renunciation characterize their performance. He, who making God his support in every way, performs all actions including even the optional ones, will attain Him fully through His grace.

Therefore Arjuna is exhorted in these words: "With all actions surrendered to Me with the definite understanding that the individual self belongs to Me and is under My control and surrendered along with all agents and objects of worship, and seeking Me alone as the supreme end of action, do thou perform all actions; thus with this mode of thought as they support, do thou always keep me in thy mind. If thou keepest Me in mind and doest all actions, thou wilt surmount all wordly impediments through My grace alone.

If thou heedest not My words out of pride, thou wilt perish. There is no one else who knows what is good and evil for all creatures; and no one else who rules them. Shouldest thou hold thyself capable of discriminating between good and evil by thine own judgment and resolve not to fight, such defiant determination on thy part will be falsified. Nature will take hold of thee and make thee fight. By defying My counsel, thou wilt embrace slavery to Nature. Thou, as a warrior, art endowed with the fighting propensity and art not free. Thou wilt do, what thou in ignorance doest not want to do."

The central principle embodied in this specific exhortation to Arjuna is now set forth clearly and in words of great beauty.

The Supreme Lord of the universe dwells within the

hearts of all beings, in the centre of their personality, wherein arises all understanding from which spring all forms of action and withdrawal from action and He keeps the creatures mounted on the machine of Nature in perpetual movement through the operation of his divine power consisting of the three Guṇas, in accordance with their antecedent Guṇas.

The verse (61) brings out three fundamental ideas:

- (1) The supreme personality dwells within all the individual selves as the central reality within them.
- (2) The selves in their condition of embodied existence are set within the machinery of Nature.
- (3) They are actuated in their several modes of life and maintained in them by Him through the mysterious powers of Prakṛti, which is a dimension of His own all-inclusive being.

Thus are the creatures subjected to the necessity characteristic of His temporal play of creative self-manifestation.

There is a way and only one way of release from the grip of this otherwise inexorable realm of necessity.

Man seeking release must surrender himself to Him alone in an integral and total act of self-dedication. Through His grace he will attain supreme peace and the abode eternal. Man realizes freedom through a complete self-giving to the indwelling master of the entire realm of finite reality.

In this single verse (62) both the supreme way as surrender and the supreme goal as the attainment of absolute peace and life eternal are enunciated in a crisp and clear manner. Unconditioned and eternal blessedness is the gift of the Supreme One worshipped through supreme surrender.

Both in the realm of bondage and the realm of freedom God is the absolute power. The transition from one to the other is effected by His grace, and this grace is His response to the prayerful submission of the finite individual. Human

freedom is conserved in that the self-glorification or self-dedication makes for the quiescence or liberation of Divine Grace.

The three-fold theme of philosophy comprehending the Tattwa, Hita and Puruṣārtha, is definitively stated here in a tone which indicates that the climax of the teaching is being approached. Within the context of the Tattwa itself the Supreme Spirit, the individual self and the material field of the self-evolution of the latter are affirmed in all their distinctiveness. The five-fold truth, traditionally named Artha-pañchaka, concerning the self, the ultimate, the hindrance to self-perfection, of the nature of transmigration under the power of Māyā, the nature of release and the means therefor, also stands formulated. Five concepts fundamental to the philosophy of Rāmānuja are presented unambiguously and with due emphasis. They are the concepts of: (1) Antaryāmin. (2) The realm of Samsāra as a temporal Vibhuti of God. (3) Śaraṇāgati (4) Prasāda (5) Mokṣa as the attainment of the transcendent and eternal realm of God's Vibhuti.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa names the teaching as a greater secret than all secrets and herein, he claims, that all that is substantial, worthy and necessary for salvation has been enshrined. Karma-yoga, Jñāna-yoga and Bhakti-yoga have been wholly expounded.

Arjuna is asked to consider the entire teaching critically and choose his course of conduct according to his desire. It signifies an invitation to critical inquiry as opposed to the imposition of a dogma not to be questioned. The choice offered may be interpreted as either to accept the teaching or reject it. It may also mean the choice among the various yogas formulated, Karma, Jñāna and Bhakti in the light of self-examination and in accordance with one's fitness, aptitude and inclination, determined by the level of spiritual self-culture already accomplished.

On the strength of the special bond of affection towards Arjuna, Śrī Kṛṣṇa undertakes to make the choice for him. The deep love he bears to him induces him, he says, to decide what is best for Arjuna. What he now declares is characterized as his supreme word and as the greatest secret. That Bhakti-yoga is the greatest secret has been mentioned before in the ninth chapter and the same is brought forward again in conclusion.

In the two great verses that follow the final essence of the teaching is condensed.

The Upaniṣads have promulgated the path of knowledge. This knowledge is no mere understanding but a steady contemplation of God. That contemplation must acquire the quality of direct perception and must be characterized by extreme love towards the infinite spirit being contemplated. When these conditions are fulfilled the knowledge in question is fittingly described as Bhakti. In this verse Bhakti of this nature is inculcated.

‘May thy mind dwell on Me. May it be filled with absolute love towards Me and dwell on Me with that love. May that loving contemplation issue in complete service to Me—with perfect love. May that loving contemplation make thee surrender thyself to Me with perfect love.’

Here the injunction directs Arjuna to contemplation. Love is prescribed as a necessary character of this contemplation. The loving contemplation leads to service and surrender and they should also be characterized by love.

“Following this way, thou wilt attain Me. This is a true promise of Mine and no empty declaration for purposes of merely inducing thee to take to this way, for Thou art dear to Me. As thy love reaches this height and intensity, My love also reaches the climax; I will no longer be able to bear separation from thee. I will bring it about that thou wilt reach Me”.

That Bhakti leads to the consummation of union with God has been positively asserted. The attainment of the supreme end is promised on oath, as it were, and the law of love operating towards that goal has been formulated.

There is a negative aspect in the attainment. The hindrances to the achievement must be eradicated. How these hindrances collectively constituting evil are to be destroyed is explained in the next verse (66).

There is no passage in the whole of the *Gītā* comparable in weight of import with this verse. Naturally it has elicited an immense wealth of interpretation. The constituent elements that go to form its thought and all the terms in it have received the most thorough-going consideration. On Rāmānuja's interpretation it prescribes the method of achieving redemption from the obstacles that prevent the realization of the positive ideal. There are two varieties of obstacles; there are those that obstruct the attainment of God and there are those that obstruct the cultivation of the right means therefor. Hence Rāmānuja offers two alternative interpretations, both of which are valid in relation to the two types of difficulties likely to be encountered by the seekers of God depending on the level of their spiritual development.

The verse may be roughly rendered thus for facilitating the comprehension of the elucidation.

“Renouncing all Dharmas, resort to me alone for refuge. I will liberate thee from all sins. Do not grieve”.

I

The term Dharma here means the ways of realizing the supreme good. In the light of the *Gītā* the ways are Karma, Jñāna and Bhakti. Renouncing them means the practice of them with the Sāttwic renunciation already advocated in the text. They are to be pursued without the egoistic idea of doer-ship, without attachment to them as instrumental to

one's egoistic wel-being and without the craving for any rewards. In short the three Yogas are to be adopted with the three-fold renunciation.

Resorting to God alone for refuge signifies holding Him who is the author of one's entire Sādhana, the object of one's entire worship, and the end of one's entire efforts as the means of one's attainment of Him.

Men with no Vedāntic enlightenment, regard themselves as the authors of their actions, worship in their religious practice lesser divinities, seek ends like pleasure or secular welfare and look upon their own endeavour as the force bringing about their attainment. The four factors are mutually different and all of them are different from the Supreme Reality. It is in opposition to this, that the present teaching advocates the contemplation and acceptance of God who is the author of all deeds, the object of all worship, the sole end of all endeavour, as Himself the efficacious power bringing about one's attainment of Him.

If such a practice of the Dharma is accomplished with the requisite renunciation and the prescribed attitude of resorting to Him as the means, God will emancipate the devotee from all sins of commission and omission that have hitherto hindered his attainment of his supreme objective. Arjuna is exhorted to shed all despondency and spiritual grief, that might have arisen in view of such otherwise insurmountable hindrances. The last sentence embodies an exhilarating assurance of emancipation and means to annihilate Arjuna's spiritual anxiety concerning the possibility of redemption.

In this interpretation the significant points are:

- (1) The Dharmas are taken as Karma-yoga, Jñāna-yoga and Bhakti-yoga.
- (2) The renunciation enjoined is not giving up the prac-

tice of Dharma but the spiritual dissociation from the three-fold egoism; of the sense of authorship of deeds, the attachment to deeds as one's own and of hankering after fruits for oneself.

- (3) Taking refuge in God alone signifies the adoption of and surrender to God as the sole means of redemption, who in reality is the doer of all deeds, the object of all worship and the ultimate goal.
- (4) The sins, emancipation from which is promised are the sins obstructive of the union with God and not the ones that obstruct the practice of the means.
- (5) The total purport of the verse is that Bhakti-yoga defined and enjoined in the previous verse must have the two-fold complement of renunciation and surrender. Surrender accomplishes the destruction of hindrances and Bhakti secures the positive ideal of God-realization.

II

The second interpretation follows from an understanding of the specific nature of sorrow on the part of Arjuna which Śrī Kṛṣṇa endeavours to remove by this last instruction.

Arjuna realizes that the Bhakti inculcated is so exalted and holy that only persons of the highest purity could practise it. Devotion so high is possible only for those who are already extremely beloved of the Lord.

He is oppressed with a keen consciousness of his overwhelming sins which are preventive of the emergence of real Bhakti in him. No Dharma, which he could practise in expiation of the sins would be adequate. What he could now do by way of penance is hopelessly meagre and feeble in comparison to the immensity of sins that obstruct the rise of true Bhakti. This consciousness of sin and the realization of

his utter incompetence to liberate himself by his own efforts by way of Dharma plunge Arjuna into profound depths of spiritual grief. To cure him of this grief Śrī Kṛṣṇa addresses these words to him.

“Give up all the acts of Dharma aimed at the expiation of thy sins. For purposes of accomplishing the emergence of Bhakti-yoga in thee, surrender to Me alone as the sole refuge; to Me, who am infinitely merciful, do not make distinctions among creatures that approach Me for refuge, and an ocean of forgiving love to My devotees.

I will liberate thee from all the sins that prevent thee from taking to the pathway of Bhakti and therefore do not grieve on this account.”

This elucidation contains the following special points:

- (1) The sorrow of Arjuna is identified as arising out of his keen and deep awareness of his unworthiness to take to the path of Bhakti.
- (2) The Dharmas that are to be given up are the ones that are generally prescribed for expiation of great sins.
- (3) The sins from which emancipation is promised are the ones that obstruct the birth of the exalted Bhakti advocated in the previous verse.
- (4) The goal that is to be realized through the surrender herein enjoined is not liberation from bondage but Bhakti in its highest form.
- (5) While the surrender, on the first interpretation, is a complement to Bhakti, according to this interpretation it is what renders possible the very emergence of Bhakti in the desired form. It is not just a concomitant of Bhakti but its very source.

There is yet another interpretation of the verse in the tradition of Rāmānuja. While it is not given in the com-

mentary on the *Gītā*, it is unmistakably incorporated in his devotional composition, the celebrated Śaraṇāgati-gadya. It is worthwhile considering that interpretation also.

III

On this interpretation the renunciation of Dharma does not mean giving up anything. It just signifies that the aspirant is fully convinced of the impossibility of realizing the ideal of liberation through Dharma. Dharma means Bhakti-yoga with all that it involves. The impossibility is realized owing to the aspirants' lack of requisite knowledge, incapacity for fruitful practice, impatience to await the full maturation of Bhakti and the non-fulfilment of the other accessory conditions laid down in the Śāstras. When the seeker is fully and firmly established in this extremity of hopelessness the pathway of Prapatti is enjoined.

He has to surrender himself to God wholly and place the burden of effectuating his salvation in the hands of God entirely.

God in His Infinite knowledge, power and compassion takes up his burden and showers His boundless and omnipotent grace on him. His sins, coming in the way of his redemption, are completely reduced to ashes, as it were, and the devotee is raised to the perfection of union with the object of his aspiration and adoration. He is to grieve no more. The ecstasy of triumph is his for ever. God be thanked for this miracle of complete redemption.

The unique feature of this interpretation is that it takes surrender or Prapatti as a complete, self-sufficient and direct Sādhana. It does not function as a completing supplement of Bhakti as on the first interpretation and its efficacy does not lie in merely generating Bhakti as on the second. *It is neither an accessory to another principal means nor the means of its emergence.* It constitutes by itself the principal and direct means of Mokṣa.

Though the three explanations are different in certain particulars they are applications of a single principle. The pathway of self-surrender is a method of all-sufficing efficacy. It can complete the work of Bhakti, it can bring about Bhakti and it can also accomplish by itself what Bhakti in its ideal condition accomplishes. It can complete, produce and replace Bhakti. While Bhakti both for its emergence and fullness of efficacy needs Prapatti, Prapatti does not require the aid of Bhakti in that manner. This indispensability and all-accomplishing power of Prapatti is due to the fact that it consists of surrender to God for making Him work as the means for realizing the end in question. Therefore all the exaltation that Prapatti receives is just an acknowledgement of the infinite potency of Divine Grace.

Bearing the entire implication in mind and considering all the valid explanations of the text Vedānta Deśika sums up the substance in the following verse:

ಸುದುಷ್ಕರೇಣ ಶೋಚೇದ್ಯೋಯೇನಯೇನೇಷ್ಟ ಹೇತುನಾ ।
 ಸಸತಸ್ಯಾಹಮೇವೇತಿ ಚರಮಶ್ಲೋಕಸಂಗ್ರಹಃ ॥
 सुदुष्करेण शोचेद्यो येनयेनेष्टहेतुना ।
 ससतस्याहमेवेति चरमश्लोकसंग्रहः ॥

“If a man grieves owing to his incapacity to appropriate and employ effectively the means to the realization of any particular end, I become to him that particular means and bring about his accomplishment of that end. Such is the substance of this last instruction”. This applies to all ends and all the means to them. That God can be substituted for all means for all ends is the unique implication of the doctrine of Prapatti.

In the present context He is the means for the completion of Bhakti cultivated for the sake of Mokṣa, the means for the bringing about of Bhakti itself as the end and also the means for the final emancipation of the individual self into complete union with God.

The discourse has come to a close with this verse (66) embodying the teaching of surrender.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa enjoins on Arjuna that this sublime instruction, meaning the whole of the *Gītā*, should not be imparted to one who has performed no austerities and to one who has no devotion towards the teacher and God. Even if the man has performed austerities but is no devotee, he does not deserve the teaching. It should not be given to one who does not serve the teacher with eagerness for learning it. Even if one is a devotee, in the absence of this eager service for the sake of learning, he should not receive this teaching. Finally and most important of all, one who on hearing of God's nature, glories and attributes attempts to ascribe to Him faults and imperfections does not merit this precious teaching.

“He who speaks out this supreme secret among the devotees of God, is practising the highest Bhakti to God and he is sure to attain Him. There is no one dearer to God than this man at any time.

“Teaching the unworthy is more undesirable than the refusal to teach the worthy. Hence the prohibition is placed earlier than the positive command.

“He who studies for himself this dialogue is practising what is called sacrifice in the form of knowledge. Through that sacrifice he is propitiating the Deity.

“He who simply listens to this discourse with faith and no contrary spirit is also freed from the sins obstructing Bhakti and he attains the worlds to which devotees with holy works to their credit go.”

Śrī Kṛṣṇa asks:

“Have thou listened to me, Oh! Arjuna, carefully with concentration of attention? Is thy delusion born of ignorance destroyed?”

Arjuna answers:

“Imperishable Lord! Through thy grace, my delusion is

gone and I have attained enlightenment. I am now without doubt and I will do as thou dost direct me”.

Rāmānuja explains the precise nature of the delusion, the enlightenment, the doubt and the particular direction Śrī Kṛṣṇa has given Arjuna in relation to his immediate course of action.

The delusion is three-fold:

- (a) The identification of the self with the body
- (b) The failure to recognize that the whole universe consisting of finite spirits and matter is constituting the body of the Supreme Spirit and has It as its soul;
- (c) That Karma, which in reality is instrumental to realize God when performed in the spirit of worship, will bring about the bondage of spirit.

The enlightenment correspondingly consists of these truths:

- (a) The self transcends the body and is of the nature of knowledge. It is subservient to and under the control of the Supreme Spirit.
- (b) The Supreme Person is possessed of infinite auspicious attributes and transcends every type of imperfection. He sports through the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the entire cosmos.
- (c) This supreme person, identified with Śrī Kṛṣṇa is attainable only through supreme Bhakti, which is facilitated by the performance of one's duties in a spirit of worship; which course of life in its turn is founded on the right understanding of the Supreme Reality and the finite reals.

The doubt on the part of Arjuna was concerning what was right and wrong for him to do under the grave and critical circumstance.

The doubt originated from delusion and was converted into an agony of soul. The delusion was augmented into huge proportions by the attachment of Arjuna to his kindred and by his ill-considered compassion.

The direction Śrī Kṛṣṇa gives to Arjuna in relation to his immediate situation is that he should engage himself in battle by way of Karma-yoga bearing in mind its ultimate bearing on his spiritual destiny.

After narrating the whole dialogue to Dhṛitarāṣṭra, Sanjaya adds these concluding words vividly expressing his personal reaction.

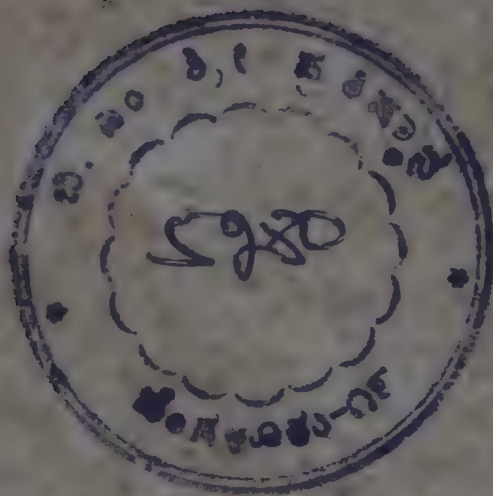
“Thus I heard this marvellous and thrilling dialogue between Vāsudeva and Pārtha, the ‘great-souled’ one, who had taken refuge at His feet.

Through the grace of Bhagavan Vyāsa, I could hear this great secret called Yoga, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of allgreatness, was himself speaking it out. Oh! King! As I remember again and again this sanctifying and marvellous dialogue between Keśava and Arjuna, I am filled with supreme joy again and again.

“As I remember again and again that most marvellous form of Hari, I am carried away by the greatest marvel and am filled with supreme joy again and again.

In my judgment, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of all the powers of all beings and Himself the Lord of the universe and Arjuna, holding his bow and depending solely on the Lord, are, there dwell abidingly glory, victory, prosperity and sound and righteous policy.”





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